

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE

FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 168 WEST 23D STREET, NEW YORK

No. 959.

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 18, 1916.

Price 5 Cents.



THE HAUNTED BELFRY

OR
THE MYSTERY
OF THE
OLD CHURCH TOWER.

BY HOWARD AUSTIN.

AND OTHER STORIES

But an instant before Charley had with his own eyes beheld the belfry vacant, and now—
Well, now there was an aged man in the belfry tugging away at the
bell-rope with all his might.

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By HOWARD AUSTIN

CHAPTER I.

A VERY STRANGE AFFAIR.

"Is Mr. Williamson in?"

"Yes, but you can't see him."

"I—I think I must see him or some other officer of the company. My business is important, and——"

"What is your business?"

"I have brought the money to settle the mortgage held by the Standard Axle Grease Company on Mr. Ward's factory. My instructions are to bring back the satisfaction piece."

"Why didn't you say so before? I know all about that matter, and Mr. Williamson is not to be annoyed with an affair so trifling as the payment of a five thousand dollar mortgage. Give me the money, young man."

And the crusty bookkeeper at the office of that giant monopoly, the Standard Axle Grease Company, extended his hand toward the little opening in the high wire railing which separated his desk from the world outside.

Perhaps he thought the dark-haired, handsome youth who stood without the rail was about to hand him check or cash.

If so, he was mistaken.

The young man drew back, making no movement to open the great wallet, seemingly well stuffed with bills, which he held tightly clutched in his left hand.

"I am instructed to examine the satisfaction papers before I pay over the money," he said, with evident embarrassment.

"What's that? What's that? Do you take us for cheats and swindlers in here? If you do, you—— But I've no time to argue with a fool. Stand one side, there, while I attend to the gentleman behind you. I'll speak to you later on."

There were two persons behind Charles Oxford waiting their turn to state their business at the little opening in the wire rail.

As the crusty bookkeeper snapped out his speech, one of these crowded his way in front of the boy, who, flushing up to the eyes, drew to one side and leaned against a high, standing desk which stood against the wall.

"The old savage," he muttered. "He thinks he can get the best of me, but he can't. I'll run no risks in this shop, for I know it too well. I'll wait until I can carry out my instructions to the letter, if I have to wait all night."

And resting the hand which grasped the pocketbook upon the standing desk, Charles Oxford waited in silence while one after another came and went. It was late in the afternoon, and the boy was most anxious to see the end of his important errand.

In fact, he would have much preferred that the errand had been intrusted to some one else.

To be sure, it showed the high degree of confidence which Mr. Ward, his employer, placed in his integrity, that he had been willing to intrust him with so large a sum as five thousand dollars; but then Mr. Ward had known Charles Oxford from infancy—knew his father before him; and what is more to the point, was unable to come himself.

So Charles Oxford continued to wait, leaning against the

desk, growing more and more impatient as the moments passed.

Presently a door opened.

It was a door communicating with an inner office, and was close beside the desk.

Through the door a tall, sleek-looking gentleman, somewhat past middle age, now came out, who walking across the open space consulted—or pretended to consult—a map which hung against the wall.

As he passed the boy without even glancing at him, the face of the latter turned pale, then red, then pale again.

It was pale and determined when the man suddenly turned to re-enter the office, and appearing to catch sight of Charles Oxford, smiled, disagreeably, at the same time extending his hand.

"Ah! This is John Oxford's boy, is it not? Glad to see you. No news of your father, I suppose?"

"No, sir, there is no news. I want to speak to you about that mortgage of Mr. Ward's."

Somehow or other Charles Oxford did not seem to see the proffered hand, and yet, as he was perfectly well aware, he stood face to face with Mr. Williamson, the president of the Standard Axle Grease Co., the very person for whom he had inquired when he first came in.

"Ward's mortgage? What about it?"

"I am sent to pay it."

"Oh, indeed. Well, Mr. Mincks, my bookkeeper, will attend to that. Sorry there is no news of your father. Mincks, attend to Mr. Oxford as soon as you can."

And Mr. Williamson passed on into the office, neglecting to shut the door.

"I'll get the papers," said the bookkeeper, more civilly. "Just wait a moment, if you please."

He was in the act of turning from his desk, when out of the inner office sprang a villainous little spitz dog, which began to bark and snap at Charles Oxford's heels.

"Down, sir! Down!" cried the boy.

In the excitement of the moment, he let go his hold on the pocketbook, and gave the dog a kick which sent him howling back from whence he came.

It was all done in an instant.

There was now nobody standing without the rail but himself. And yet when Charles Oxford turned to take up the pocketbook it was gone.

The young man stared at the desk in amazement.

There was nothing on it but a blotting pad, a dirty ink-stand, and one or two inky pens.

It was a desk for signing receipts, and entirely open at the bottom, while behind it was simply the papered wall.

"That dog is a nuisance. You served him right," said the bookkeeper, returning an instant later. "Now, then, where's the money? Here's the satisfaction piece for that mortgage, young man."

Where was the money, sure enough?

The pocketbook was not on the desk, nor had it fallen to the floor.

In the brief absence of the bookkeeper, Charles Oxford had

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unsuccessfully examined every pocket about his clothing, but in vain.

"I—I can't find it!" he stammered, his face turning a deathly white. "I laid it on this desk when the dog sprang at me and now it's gone."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Williamson, coming suddenly out of the inner office.

"The pocketbook with Mr. Ward's five thousand dollars," said Charles Oxford, becoming every moment more confused. "You saw it in my hand when you spoke to me a moment ago. Now it's gone."

"Gone! Nonsense! How can it be gone if you had it?"

"But it is. That dog sprang at me. I laid it on this desk—"

"Did you kick my dog, young man?"

"Yes. I did!" cried Charles, his indignation rising at the man's insulting me. "I kicked him, and I'm sorry I didn't kick him harder. Where's that pocketbook, Mr. Williamson? Some one has been playing on me."

"What do you mean, you young rascal?"

"Some one took that pocketbook off the desk."

"Who was in the office out here beside yourself?"

"There wasn't any one."

"Then what are you talking about? Do you mean to intimate that I took it?"

"I intimate nothing. I only know that I laid it here, and now it's gone."

"Then you took it yourself. Perhaps you never had a pocketbook. How do we know?"

"You saw me have it. You must have seen it."

"I saw nothing of the sort. When I passed you both your hands were empty. Did you see this boy have a pocketbook, Mincks?"

"No, I didn't," growled the bookkeeper, screwing up his ugly face and leering hideously. "I'm quite sure he had nothing in either hand."

Now this was entirely too much, for when he had first addressed the bookkeeper, Charles Oxford was positive that he had laid the pocketbook down upon the little glass shelf before the opening in the office rail.

"You are trying to rob me!" he shouted, losing all control of himself at last. "You want to ruin me, Mr. Williamson, just as you ruined my poor father. One of you know what became of that pocketbook. Give it to me, or I'll call the police!"

"What! you young scamp?" cried Mr. Williamson, seizing the boy by the collar and dragging him toward the outer door. "You dare to accuse me of stealing? You threaten me in my own office? Go to the police, if you think best, and, by heavens, I'll swear out a warrant for larceny against you, even if Ward does not. Get out of this, and don't you dare show your face in my office again!"

And before Charles Oxford fairly realized what was happening he found himself flying down the office steps and sprawling upon the sidewalk outside.

CHAPTER II.

THE YELLOW CAB.

Smarting under the insult he had received, alarmed beyond all measure at the loss of his employer's money, Charles Oxford picked himself up, and for a moment remained standing in front of the office of the Standard Axle Grease Co.'s factory, uncertain what course to pursue.

The case was a desperate one.

Unless he could recover the lost pocketbook the boy knew that not only would his own reputation be ruined forever, but his employer's business as well.

As has been already intimated, the Standard Axle Grease Co. was a grasping monopoly.

Ten years before there had been several persons gaining an honest living in New York City by the manufacture of axle grease; now there was practically but one concern.

This was the Standard Co.—or rather John J. Williamson, for they were generally understood to be one and the same thing.

This change had been brought about by the most unscrupulous business methods.

By cutting prices, and selling inferior goods, little by little the monopolist absorbed or destroyed the business of all his brother dealers, until only two beside himself remained.

These were Mr. Ward and Charles Oxford's father.

There was only one now, for six months before the opening of our story, John Oxford, who still bravely maintained the fight against monopoly, had walked out of his office one evening, announcing that he was going to his home.

He never reached it.

He was known to have gone as far as Broadway, and been seen to enter a cab.

From that moment all trace of John Oxford was lost.

It was as sad as well as a most mysterious affair, and the saddest part of it was that Charles Oxford's mother had died from the shock, leaving the boy utterly alone in the world.

Alone! Yes, and penniless, for it soon developed that the Standard Axle Grease Co. possessed some sort of a legal hold upon the business for the missing merchant, which hold Mr. Williamson lost no time in making use of, and Oxford's patent axle grease, what at one time had proved most profitable, was speedily wiped out of sight.

Then it was the Standard and one other.

That other was Hiram Ward, a worthy man, who had also fought the monopoly bravely, and who deserved all the more credit from the fact that he was paralyzed from the waist down, and had to be wheeled to his place of business each day in a chair.

Mr. Ward had taken Charles Oxford in hand almost from the first; and when the detectives had given up the search and the police ceased to interest themselves in the matter, it was he who gave the boy employment, paying him a salary which he could ill afford.

Now, somehow or other, Mr. Williamson had got hold of a mortgage upon Mr. Ward's business.

The mortgage had been made to an outsider, who had sold it to the Standard Company later on.

It was due on the day of which we write, and fearing that his enemy would foreclose and wipe him out, Mr. Ward had gone to great lengths to raise the money.

He was unable to go himself to the office of the Standard Company; he disliked the idea of sending a check, lest Mr. Williamson, whom he knew to be most anxious that the mortgage should not be paid, should make some excuse and refuse to accept it. So, instead of intrusting the whole matter to a good lawyer, as he should have done, Mr. Ward made up the amount in \$100-dollar bills and sent Charles Oxford up to the Standard's factory to pay the mortgage off.

And this was the result!

It meant utter ruin to Mr. Ward if the missing pocketbook could not be found.

In view of all this, is it any wonder that Charles Oxford was somewhat excited?

We should say decidedly not.

Not only was he excited, but also confused and mystified, so much so, in fact, that when he reached the nearest police station—and in spite of Mr. Williamson's threat he hurried there immediately—he found himself unable to speak without stammering violently, and his story elicited no attention at all.

"Been robbed in Williamson's factory! Nonsense!" sneered the sergeant at the desk. "You've dropped your money somewhere in the street, bub. Mr. Williamson is a personal friend of mine, and one of the most honest men in the world."

And without even waiting to ascertain the amount of loss, the sergeant motioned Charles Oxford to one side and began to talk to some one else.

It was now quite dark, for the days grow short along toward the end of November.

When Charles Oxford passed out of the police station, in a state almost bordering on insanity, it was to find the rain descending in torrents.

Scarce knowing what he did, he hurried back to the factory, willing again to brave the anger of his father's enemy if only the pocketbook could be found.

When he reached the factory he found the office closed.

All hands had gone for the night, so the watchman said.

As for the pocketbook, the watchman had not even heard of its being lost.

And as the hours of the evening crept on, Charles Oxford paced the streets of the great city in the pelting rain in a state of mind beyond the power of pen to describe.

It had been up one street and down another, until now it was well toward midnight.

He could not bring himself to face Mr. Ward, although it had been arranged that he should call at his employer's house by nine o'clock.

Go home to his room in the cheap boarding-house where he

lodged he would not; nor could he make up his mind to apply to the police station.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" murmured the poor fellow, as he found himself opposite one of the cheap theatres in the Bowery, out of which a dense crowd was pouring. "Mr. Ward is ruined, and my carelessness has caused it. They will begin foreclosure proceedings to-morrow, and——"

"Hello, Charley! What the deuce brings you here? Have you been inside? It was a bully show to-night. Pat Dooley was just immense!"

It was a young and very stylishly-dressed fellow, who, darting suddenly from the crowd, seized Charles Oxford by the arm.

It was also the wretched boy's chum and warmest friend, Sam Lovell by name.

"Sam! You here! Oh, how glad I am to see you."

"Glar! Why, of course, you are glad. But what in the world is the matter? You look as though something dreadful had happened."

"Sam! I'm ruined!"

"Ruined! What do you mean?"

With a convulsive movement Charley grasped the arm of his friend, and, drawing him to the curb out of the way of the crowd, related the story of his loss.

"Phew! By the great horn spoon, Charley Oxford, you have got yourself into a mess."

"I have ruined myself, Sam, and what is worse, I have brought ruin on Mr. Ward."

"Do you think old Williamson took the pocketbook?"

"I don't know what to think. My head spins around so I can't think. Sam, I believe I'm going mad."

"Mad! Nonsense! You are going around to the Prince street police station with me. You are all broke up, and—— Confound you, clumsy, you've got mud all over my new pants!"

It was a boy who, suddenly darting between the friends, had run out into the street and could now be seen in the act of entering a passing cab.

"I'd like to break his head," snapped Sam. "But, I say, old man, what's that?"

Now Charles Oxford had turned paler than ever.

In his hand he held a sheet of paper, upon which he gazed with staring eyes.

"Stop him! Stop him!" he shouted suddenly, making a dart toward the boy, who had by this time almost reached the cab.

"Stop who?" cried Sam. "You don't mean the boy that put mud on my pants?"

But Charley did not heed him.

He had already gained the middle of the street, and was running after the now-moving cab, shouting aloud to the driver to stop.

His shouts were of no avail.

Instead of stopping the cab—it was painted a bright-yellow—only moved the faster.

In spite of the hopelessness of the chase, Charley would have attempted to follow it had not his companion grasped him by the arm.

"Say, what ails you? Are you going crazy?" he demanded.

"No—no! That boy—he thrust this letter into my hand as he pushed between us. Look, Sam! Look! There's the bookkeeper now. Let me go, will you? Let me get after that cab."

Even as Charley spoke Sam Lovell saw a man's head thrust from the window of the yellow cab.

It was Mr. Mincks, the crusty bookkeeper.

Catching sight of the face of Charley Oxford, he suddenly drew back, and the yellow cab rolled away at tremendous speed.

CHAPTER III.

SEEN IN THE OLD CHURCH TOWER.

"Charley! Charley! You must be crazy!"

"Let go of me, Sam Lovell! Let go of me, I say! It was old Mincks who sent that boy—he knows all about it—stop the yellow cab! Stop the yellow cab!"

"Hush! For heaven's sake, hush, Charley! We shall have the whole crowd about us in a moment. See, they think you are drunk, and are looking this way already. Calm yourself, old man! Calm yourself, and come over to the other side of the street."

"Upon my word, I believe Charley is a little off," Sam thought to himself, as almost by main strength he drew his friend to the opposite curb. "I don't believe he knew the man in the yellow cab at all, and as for the paper——"

Well, as for the paper, it altered the whole current of Sam Lovell's reflections when, a moment later, Charley Oxford placed it in his hands.

It was the half of an ordinary note sheet upon which some one had hastily scrawled with a pencil the following words:

"To Mr. Ward's Clerk.—If you want to know what became of the pocketbook lost by you late this afternoon in the office of the Standard Axle Grease Company, call at No. 43 Gwinnett street, between Broome and Delancey, before midnight. Ring the bell and inquire for Mr. Pollock. Don't state your business, or you will have your labor for your pains."

"P. S.—Don't think that I wish to make any money out of you, for I don't. I am acting simply in the interest of truth and justice, and I don't intend to lose my place."

Can any one wonder that Charles Oxford was excited, as standing beneath the flaring gaslamp which burned above the theatre billboard he first comprehended the meaning of these lines.

He had seen Mr. Mincks, the crusty bookkeeper, inside the yellow cab even before he had made a move to stop it.

That he should have assumed the lines to have been written by Mr. Mincks was in nowise strange.

"What do you intend to do, Charley?" was Sam's first question, after giving exclamation to his surprise.

"Do! Why, to go to No. 43 Gwinnett street, Sam, you can just bet your life."

"But this may be a trap."

"I don't believe it. Mr. Mincks wrote that. He and this Pollock are the same person. I haven't the least doubt in the world that he will tell me that Williamson took the pocketbook while my attention was called off by the dog. I don't blame him a bit for being cautious. Bookkeepers' positions don't grow on every bush for a man of his age."

"Probably the dog was set upon you on purpose?"

"Of course it was. Sam, will you come with me? Don't you don't want to, but decide quick, for if I am to go to Gwinnett street by midnight I haven't an instant to lose."

"Of course, I'll go with you, Charley! What do you mean for? Do you suppose I'd leave you in the shape you're in to-night. No, not if my new pants are ruined, and, by George, off a cerber if this rain keeps up."

And without further parley the friends hurried as busy, and Bowery and boarded an east-bound Grand street car, even robbed of

It lacked but a quarter to twelve by the clock when they passed Hoe's printing press factory when they passed

Grand and Cannon streets.

Five minutes later, the boys, hurrying one, and I believe street, came in sight of No. 43.

A yellow cab was just rolling away from it."

As it passed, both perceived that it was

It is unnecessary to state that the keeper, will testify to it. Charles Oxford with renewed hope.

"You see it is just as I tell you, steady on its face, Mr. Wil—that sour old Mincks who is trying to get me?"

for it. If Mr. Ward don't do some factory to-morrow morning, "Hush!" whispered Sam. "Hush! Then I want you to

It was a horrible neighborhood."

Foul tenements rose upon every side of the thief?"

and fairly blockaded with enemies I believe it as much as I believe were at least a dozen saloons in the neighborhood of this kind

No. 43 was evidently a house, sir! I occupy altogether too, and so were its neighbors in the neighborhood. This thing must be cleared part.

Adjoining it on the south he straightened himself up, and struck built of gray stone and having

While No. 43 Gwinnett street," replied the detective, quietly. church looked silent, deserted, remarks Mr. Williamson withdrew.

Over the parlor window he muttered, as he strode along Brick played.

street. "If the letter scheme works

! church well and good. If it don't,

PROFESSOR FORCE as to convince Doxy of his guilt.

! Ford brood out of my way and Ward

was the way it read. As I'll have plain sailing in the grease Behind the windows is to come."

to the music of harp Doxy turned into Bleecker street and to the wretched street town.

"Say, Charley, had we better go in?" whispered Sam, doubtfully.

"I'm going whether you do or not," replied Charley; and without wasting a moment he ran up the steps of Professor Forgey's establishment and pulled the bell.

It was opened by a good-looking colored man.

"Pollock," he said in answer to Charley's inquiry. "All right, gemmen. He's expecting one ob you, though he didn't say nuthin' about two."

"Hadn't you better wait here, Sam?" whispered Charley.

"Not much. I'm going wherever you go."

And in spite of the doubtful air of the darky, Sam Lovell followed Charley inside the house.

"Right dis way, gemmen," said their guide, moving toward the stairs.

Really there seemed no cause for Sam's fears, since the house was filled with dancers.

They were waltzing in the parlors, and keeping it up not one whit less merrily on the floor above.

The musicians were stationed at the head of the stairs, and were playing away for dear life; and as the boys moved along the upper hall they had to elbow their way through a crowd of well-dressed young fellows who were leaning against the banisters, smoking cigarettes, and who eyed the newcomers with inquiring glances as they passed.

Up another flight of stairs, and still another, until at last their guide ushered them into a room which was totally dark.

"Mr. Pollock is in de nex' room, gemmen," he remarked, "an' he told me to show you right in. It's kinder dark. Be careful how you go."

It was more than dark—it was utter blackness.

The boys could see nothing, and when the negro threw open another door and bade them enter, they supposed that he was still ahead of them, when—

Bang!

All of a sudden the door was slammed behind them, and they stood in the darkness alone.

What could it mean?

In vain the boys called aloud and pounded on the door.

There came no answer.

It began indeed to look as though Sam's fears had had foundation—that they had walked into a trap.

"See here, Sam, I can't stand this," exclaimed Charley at once. "Perhaps after all we are letting our fears get the police of us. Let's move ahead and try to find out where 'Wha'—"

the boy indeed, there seemed nothing else to do.

"You dare them they had been able to muster but one match, own office while its light lasted, showed the boys that they heavens, I've end of a narrow passage leading off into the even if Wai—"

show your fa—ding, they now moved along the passage, coming before out into what appeared to be an extensive loft opening he found dimly penetrated from above.

sprawling upon the faint night glow of the great city, and open trapdoor in the roof overhead.

der leading from the floor of the loft up calling to Sam to follow him, Charley ran nimbly up.

trap, he comprehended their situation

THI

f of the old church adjoining the Smarting under the insultedly but a moment before.

all measure at the loss of his great steeple with the belfry a ford picked himself up, and read.

in front of the office of the fat; though the sides were steep tory, uncertain what course to

The case was a desperate one obtaining a view of the street, Unless he could recover the, when his attention was sud-

that not only would his own re the old church tower. his employer's business as well. the belfry, and the hands

As has been already intimate bell was swinging up and Co. was a grasping monopoly.

Ten years before there had been out giving forth the slightest honest living in New York City

grouse; now there was practically unt, and before Sam Lovell This was the Standard Co.—or roof.

for they were generally understood swinging bell a strange thing. ispeakable horror such as

This change had been brought about by cutting price, and selling inferior, but no sound came

the monopolist absorbed or destroyed brother dealers, until only two beside ding in the belfry the

But stay! Was it a man?

Whoever or whatever it was, one thing remained certain—it had appeared most suddenly, most strangely.

But an instant before Charley had with his own eyes beheld the belfry vacant, and now—

Well, now there was an aged man in the belfry tugging away at the bell rope with all his might.

His dress was that of the days of our grandfathers: knee breeches, long-skirted coat of a military cut, with great, flapping pockets, bright brass buttons, and gold epaulettes upon the shoulders.

His head was bare, and turned toward the astonished youth who stood staring upon the roof beneath the belfry; his features, though withered and much wrinkled, were by no means unpleasing, while his hair, as white as the driven snow, hung in a long, tangled mass down his back.

For an instant only the strange apparition pulled upon the bell rope.

For an instant only the soundless bell continued to swing above his head.

The next, and the bell hung motionless in the belfry, and the strange figure vanished into thin air.

Ghostly or human, the sight had come and gone like some passing shadow.

And Charles Oxford stood staring at the old tower—alone!

CHAPTER IV.

MR. WILLIAMSON INTERVIEWS DETECTIVE DOXEY.

In fancying that Mr. Mincks, the crusty bookkeeper who presided over the office of the Standard Axle Grease Company, knew anything whatever concerning the loss of his pocketbook, Charles Oxford was entirely wrong.

At the time Charley had laid down the pocketbook Mr. Minck's back was turned.

True, he stopped for an instant to look at the dog, when Charley kicked at him, but it was only for an instant. Then Mr. Mincks went back to get the papers relating to the cancellation of the mortgage.

He had no knowledge concerning the affair at all.

Yet he was certainly interested—deeply interested—for, while pretending to write, he was really eyeing his employer with great indignation, while that gentleman dragged poor Charley across the office and pitched him down the steps.

Yet Mr. Mincks made no movement to interfere.

What he did do was to dip his pen into the mucilage bottle instead of the inkstand, which may be taken as proof positive that his mind was not on what he was about.

"Confound the impudent young rascal!" sputtered Mr. Williamson as he slammed the outer door. "I never was so insulted in my life! To accuse me of stealing his pocketbook! Smother me if I believe he ever had a pocketbook! If that old wheel legs of a Ward ever sent him here with the money to pay off that mortgage, Mincks—which I very much doubt—he has stolen it himself—that's all there is about it. It's a bluff, that's what it is. Eh, Mincks, what do you say?"

"I say what you say, Mr. Williamson," replied the bookkeeper, meekly, this time dipping his pen into the pounce box and fondly expecting it to write.

"No, no, but I want your opinion, Mincks."

"But I haven't got any opinion. With all due respect to you, Mr. Williamson, I'm not hired to express opinions, but to keep books."

"What a precious old pill you are, Mincks. But there, we won't quarrel. They can't bluff me"—here Mr. Williamson straightened himself up and struck his chest twice—"no, sir, they can't bluff me, because I'm not to be bluffed. Mincks, you can order our attorneys to begin suit for foreclosure to-morrow morning—to-morrow morning, do you hear?"

"Yes, sir; all right, sir," replied the bookkeeper, dipping his pen into an open box of rubber bands. Yes, sir; to-morrow morning, sir; all right."

"And, Mincks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Call up Doxey on the telephone. Ask him if he can see me at his house at—say half-past six o'clock."

And while Mincks was busy at the telephone, Mr. Williamson stepped out into the factory.

He would have stepped in again had he known what Mincks was about just then, but as he didn't, he walked straight to the backing room, opened the door and called

"Henry!"

Immediately one of the dozen or more boys who were at work over a long bench, separated himself from his fellows and joined the president of the Standard Axle Grease Company in the passage outside.

He was a shrewd-looking fellow, and one who evidently possessed a thorough knowledge of the city and its ways.

"Henry, I've got a job for you."

"All right, sir."

"You know Charles Oxford?"

"Yes, sir. You mean the boy down at Ward's. You pointed him out to me the other day, you know."

"Exactly. I mean the boy down at Ward's. Now, I want you to come to my office in ten minutes. I shall give you a note to take to the boy down at Ward's, and shall depend upon your finding him before eleven to-night."

"But where shall I look for him, sir? I don't know where he lives."

"Don't ask me. Look in the directory. Inquire of some one, only deliver the note. If you fail you are not the boy I take you for—that's all."

Then Mr. Williamson hurried back to his office, and seating himself at his desk, wrote the very note which some hours later was thrust into Charles Oxford's hand.

Meanwhile what had Mr. Mincks been up to?

Not attending to his bookkeeping, that was certain, for the instant Mr. Williamson left the office the crusty old fellow skipped out from behind his railing and walked straight to the desk where Charles Oxford's loss had occurred.

For an instant he surveyed it silently, then raising his hand, he gently tapped the papered wall behind it at different points until suddenly there came in answer a hollow sound.

"Ah, I thought as much!" he muttered. "This is a nice sort of man I'm working for"—Mr. Mincks had not occupied his position more than a few weeks—"I'll take a look behind here and—indeed! Just so! Secret panel, eh? and just over the Grand Mogul's desk! Well, well, there are strange people in this world, and that's a fact!"

Then Mr. Mincks slipped out of the private office and returned to his desk again.

He was busy writing when Mr. Williamson got back, and he continued writing while the boy Henry passed in and out. In fact, it was noticeable how exceedingly busy he was when the president of the Standard Company came out of his office at last and stood before the rail.

"Did you get Doxey, Mincks?" inquired Mr. Williamson.

"Yes. He says he will see you at the time you named."

"Very good! Now I believe I'll go. Don't forget to see the lawyer in the morning about the foreclosure suit. Good-night, Mincks. Dear me, I'll have to take my umbrella, for it's beginning to rain."

"Good-night," growled the bookkeeper, and Mr. Williamson, umbrella in hand, passed out into the street.

The instant his back was turned, Mincks flew to the telephone, calling up a well-known livery stable a few blocks away.

"Cab!" he shouted, as the bell tinkled in answer, and then as though replying to a question, he added: "Mincks!"

Pretty soon Mr. Mincks closed the office, and putting on his rusty overcoat and battered old hat, walked leisurely down the street.

When he reached Third avenue he turned up, and continued to walk for a block or two until he came at length to a place where a yellow cab stood drawn up close to the curb.

Here he turned abruptly, and whispering a word to the driver, entered the cab, which immediately started off downtown.

Long before this Mr. Williamson had boarded a Third avenue car. This he exchanged at Twenty-third street for a cross-town car, changing again at Ninth avenue to a downtown car of the Bleecker street line. The cars were all crowded, and jogged along slowly; thus it was half-past six when Mr. Williamson found himself standing before a shabby dwelling in Brick Place near Bleecker street, looking up at the great brass number upon the door. Now just as Mr. Williamson turned into Brick Place, a yellow cab turned out of it.

This circumstance, however, was not even noticed by the president of the Standard Axle Grease Company, who assured himself that the number was the one he sought, ascended the steps and pulled the bell.

"My name is Williamson. I have an appointment with Mr. Doxey," he said to the woman who appeared in answer to his

Then without even receiving a response, Mr. Williamson was ushered into the presence of that wonderful person, the mere mention of whose name is sufficient to strike terror to the heart of the criminal in any city of the United States.

It was Doxey, the detective, whose fame had spread far and wide.

Now it was not everybody who could boast of an acquaintance with Doxey, the detective.

In fact, there were some who asserted that the real Doxey was known to no one, unless it was the inspector of police.

Some knew him as an old man, others as a young one. One would have told you that his hair was red, and that he wore a beard, while another would have been ready to affirm that this peculiar person had black hair, and wore no beard at all.

The Doxey that Mr. Williamson knew was certainly a man under forty.

His hair was brown, and his facial expression by no means unpleasing. As for his beard, he had none, wearing simply a light mustache.

He was seated at a desk in the comfortably furnished back parlor—it seemed to serve likewise for an office—when Mr. Williamson entered.

At first sight of the wealthy manufacturer, he arose, shook hands cordially, and placed a chair.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Williamson?"

"I did, Mr. Doxey. My bookkeeper telephoned to you a while ago."

"I received the message, and have been expecting you. About the Oxford matter still, I suppose?"

"Yes, and no."

"How is that?"

"First, tell me, have you learned anything concerning Mr. Oxford?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Williamson. I confess frankly, sir, that never in my life have I been called upon to deal with a case so puzzling. Absolutely this man Oxford seems to have vanished from the face of the earth."

"Well, well! I'm afraid we will be forced to give it up," was the answer of the manufacturer. "I would like to have found him, for John Oxford was a warm friend of mine. Still, if you can't gain a clue to the mystery, Doxey, there is no use for any one else to try. But let us drop the subject. I have another job for you, and one which has caused me some concern."

"What is that?" asked the detective, quietly.

"A disagreeable business happened at my office to-night. Oxford's son called pretending to have money to pay off a certain claim I hold against his employer, Hiram Ward. He was obliged to wait a moment, as my bookkeeper was busy, and while waiting suddenly called out that he had been robbed of the money, though he couldn't tell by whom or how."

"Indeed! How large a sum was it?"

"Five thousand was the amount he claimed to have lost. Between ourselves, Doxey, the boy is a bad one, and I believe he intends to steal the money himself. Why, do you know he actually had the impudence to accuse me!"

"No! That can't be possible!"

"It is a fact. Mincks, my bookkeeper, will testify to it. Why, I wasn't even in the room."

"Such an accusation is an absurdity on its face, Mr. Williamson. But what do you want of me?"

"To have you call up at the factory to-morrow morning, when I'll explain the whole business. Then I want you to take the case in hand, and—"

"And prove Charles Oxford the thief?"

"Yes, if he is the thief, and I believe it as much as I believe anything. I can't afford to have an accusation of this kind rest on me, Mr. Doxey. No, sir! I occupy altogether too prominent a position in society. This thing must be cleared up at once."

Here Mr. Williamson straightened himself up, and struck his breast three times.

"All right. I'll be on hand," replied the detective, quietly. Then after a few trifling remarks Mr. Williamson withdrew.

"I've fixed him now," he muttered, as he strode along Brick Place toward Bleecker street. "If the letter scheme works and he comes to the old church well and good. If it don't, I'll so arrange matters as to convince Doxey of his guilt. With the last of the Oxford brood out of my way and Ward ruined, I rather think I'll have plain sailing in the grease business for some years to come."

Just then Mr. Williamson turned into Bleecker street and boarded a car going downtown.

There was a yellow cab standing near the corner, but Mr. Williamson did not notice it. In fact, he never looked that way at all.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HOUSE IS THIS?

"Sam! Sam! Where are you?"

Running toward the scuttle, Charles Oxford bent down and called the name of his companion aloud.

"Here, confound it!" came a hoarse voice from the darkness beneath him. "I've been and caught myself on a nail and torn my new pants!"

"Oh, bother your pants, Sam. Come up here, quick!"

A scrambling on the ladder followed, and Sam Lovell came out upon the roof.

"Confound it all, I've torn a big hole in the left leg," he began. "Brand new, too. Paid six dollars for them—Jacobs the tailor in the Bowery—only got 'em last night."

"Let up on your pants, will you, Sam Lovell? I've seen a ghost."

"Get out!"

"But I have, though. There was the strangest-looking old fellow you ever saw up in that belfry a minute ago, pulling on the bell rope for dear life, yet the bell didn't make a sound."

"Nonsense, Charley, you're dreaming."

"I tell you I ain't. I know what I saw."

"If he was there, he's there still. Why didn't you holler to him and ask him who he was and how we are going to get out of this confounded trap?"

"Holler to him! I guess you wouldn't if you had seen him. Sam, it was awful! He was there one minute and gone the next."

"You don't mean it?"

"But I do, though."

"I'll bet ten cents I'll find him," cried Sam, "and I'm going to see."

He hurried across the roof toward the belfry, Charley following.

Certainly there was nothing in the belfry but the bell.

Nor when Sam shouted and whistled, as he did, was any answer returned.

"You're off your base to-night, Charley, that's plain to be seen," said Sam, at last. "There ain't no one there, and I don't believe you saw any one. Come, let's get out of this. We can't get onto the roofs on either side of us because this blamed church is so high. I'm going back to that door again, and, by thunder, something's got to give."

Indeed the necessity for action was apparent.

To pass from the roof of the church over upon either of those adjoining was impossible, since the church roof was higher than those alongside of it by some twenty feet.

To be sure the boys could have jumped this, but they hesitated to do it; especially as such a course would necessitate breaking through somebody's scuttle, which might lead to unpleasant consequences before they got through.

"You are right. We'll break that door down," replied Charley. "Sam, I'm so used up with all this that—There—there! What did I tell you? There it is again!"

They were close to the scuttle now, when Charley, turning for a parting glance at the belfry, suddenly beheld repeated the strange sight he had seen before.

There was the old man, dressed just as he had seen him, with his head bare and the long white hair streaming down his back.

He was tugging away at the bell rope vigorously.

The bell was swinging over and over, and yet, strange to say, no sound reached the ears of the astonished boys.

Sam saw it now, and stood staring as though petrified, a look of deadly terror overspreading his face.

Saw it but an instant, for in the next the ghostly vision departed, and again the belfry was deserted, and the great bell hung motionless beneath its supporting beam.

"Great snakes! I want to get out of this!" yelled Sam, recovering himself at last.

And wholly regardless of his precious pants, he made one dive through the scuttle and tumbled, rather than climbed, down the ladder, gaining the loft below.

Charley followed, though more slowly.

He had scarcely gained the foot of the ladder when Sam Lovell clutched his arm.

"Come, come! we can't stay here!" he whispered. "Suppose we were to run foul of that old fellow alone in the dark?"

"Well, do you believe me now?"

"Do I believe? Didn't I see? Great Jew's-harps! I'm going to get out of this somehow! I don't care if I do spoil my pants! Where's that confounded passage? Holy mackerel! What was that?"

The fact was Sam in his haste and excitement had run against a door set in the partition.

This door must have operated on a spring, for it immediately yielded, letting the boys through with a rush.

Instantly the door flew back into its place with a loud slam. For a moment Charley and Sam stood motionless in the dark, thrilled with terror.

Then as they realized what had happened, Charley began to feel about him and learned the truth.

Opening the door they perceived by aid of the faint light thrown from the scuttle that they stood at the entrance to the passage again.

"Say, there wasn't any door here when we came through," whispered Sam.

"Perhaps it was open."

"How can that be when the confounded thing won't stay open?"

"It might have been fastened back."

"So it might. Anyhow this is the passage fast enough. Come, let's hurry on. By ginger, I'll have that nigger arrested. I'll speak to the very first cop we meet."

Together they hurried along the passage. Sam keeping tight hold of Charley's arm, as though expecting at every step to encounter the belfry ghost.

They were in total darkness, and somehow the passage seemed to be longer than when they had first come through it, when all at once they came bang up against the door.

With trembling hands Charley sought the knob.

To his intense relief it yielded, and they passed on.

"Bless my soul! I'd give lots for a few matches, Charley," whispered Sam. "This room is as dark as a pocket—and why don't we hear that music? We heard it plain enough when we came through before."

"Perhaps they've quit."

"I don't understand why they should. They were at it fast enough when we came through. But here's the other door. Now, then, for the hall, and we'll have light enough at last."

And Sam threw back the door with an angry jerk.

His prediction was not realized.

It is true the boys found themselves in a hallway, and narrowly escaped a fall down a flight of stairs.

The hall, however, was dark and silent.

So was the hall below where the band had been stationed, and when the main hall on the parlor floor was gained at last, that, too, was as silent as the grave.

The music, the flashing lights, the merry dancers, had all alike disappeared.

Nor was this all.

When they had ascended the stairs they were richly carpeted, the same being true with the halls.

Now their feet struck upon bare boards alone, and when Charley mustered up courage enough to penetrate into the parlor, which so short a time previous had been seen brilliantly lighted and filled with dancers, he discovered that it, likewise, was carpetless and unfurnished, and as dark as was the rest of the house.

There was, beside, a musty smell everywhere—such a smell as is apt to pervade houses long untenanted.

Not a trace of all that had met their gaze upon their first entrance into Professor Forgey's dancing academy now remained.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GHOST OF THE HAUNTED BELFRY IS SEEN AGAIN.

"Charley Oxford, what does all this mean?"

"Don't ask me, Sam. I no more know than you do."

"But surely—surely this can't be the same house we were in before."

"I don't see how it can be any other. Do you?"

"No, I'll be blest if I do. We can't have passed over Forgey's place, nor under it."

"Nor through it, either, I should say, for—heaven preserve us, Sam! what was that?"

A wild, unearthly yell, as of some person in the last agonies, had suddenly broken upon the gloom.

It was followed by a second shriek even more terrible.

Then all was still.

"Gosh! I'm out of this!" whispered Sam Lovell. "We are in a den of murderers—I won't stay here another moment—no, not if I have to break through the windows to get out and tear my pants to shreds."

"We haven't tried the front door yet," replied Charley, hollowly. "Sam, you poor fellow, all this is meant for me, and I have drawn you into it."

"Nonsense! We are in the same boat, I guess."

"Yes, yes, but I wish in my soul that you were out of it. Think of my poor father? Can it be that he was entrapped into this dreadful place just as I have been, and—Ah, keep off! Keep off!"

The last words were fairly shouted, for just then Charles Oxford felt a cold hand advance out of the darkness and touch his face.

"What is it? Great snakes! what is it?" gasped Sam, making one leap in the direction of the front door.

"I—I felt a cold hand touch my face."

"Pshaw! It was only me. I was feeling for the banister, and touched you. You'll have me crazy if you holler like that again. By gracious, we're dished here. This door is locked."

"And the key?"

"It ain't in the lock—that's one sure thing."

"Let's try and force it open."

"It ain't no use. It's as firm as a rock. I say, Charley, let's go for the parlor windows. The glass won't stand in my way long, and as for the blinds—— Holy powers! Did you hear that?"

It was the same unearthly yell repeated which had reached their ears before.

It seemed to come from the basement, as nearly as the boys were able to locate it in the darkness, and sounded to their ears like the death shriek of some lost soul.

"Sam, what can it be?" breathed Charley, a sense of indescribable horror seizing him.

"I'll never tell you, Charley. I—hark! There it goes again!"

Again and still again the shriek rang out.

Then as the echoes died away in the deserted rooms above them, all was still.

"The window! the window!" breathed Sam, hoarsely. "Anything's better than this, Charley. Ah! blocked again! There are boards nailed up against the windows on the inside."

Sam had run into the parlor now, Charley following him.

Hurriedly both boys had groped their way to the front windows, only to find further progress in this direction summarily cut off.

As far as the sense of feeling could tell them, heavy boards had been nailed up against the front parlor windows, forming a barrier, which, under the existing circumstances, they could not hope to remove.

It was the same with the windows of the back parlor, and this accounted fully for the absences of even a single ray of light.

Outside the rain could be distinctly heard falling in torrents. It was cold, too, which probably was the reason Charley was shivering so violently; and, to add to the general dismalness of their situation, the wind howled and moaned like mad.

"We must try the basement," whispered Sam as they groped their way to the hall again, "though I don't suppose it will be any use. No doubt the outer doors are locked, and the windows boarded up same as these."

"No, no. Don't think of it," replied Charley, with a shudder. "Let's go back to the church roof and jump down. Then we can have our choice of the whole row of houses, and surely find some way to escape."

"Break open some one's scuttle and be arrested for burglary? Not much. You forget it's after midnight. Beside, I don't relish the idea of jumping that distance. The tin is wet and slippery. What's to hinder one of us falling and rolling over the cornice into the street?"

"Well, anyhow, I ain't going down into that basement, Sam Lovell."

"Why not? What's the matter with the basement any more than the rest of this precious old shebang?"

"Don't you hear?" whispered Charley, catching him by the arm. "It was from the basement the cries proceeded, and if you will only stop talking long enough to listen, you can hear some one walking about down there now."

And so, sure enough, there was.

For the next moment the boys stood listening with bated breath.

Some one with the tread of an elephant seemed to be promenading the floor below them.

"Gosh! ain't it awful, Charley? I'm all in a cold sweat. You're right about the basement—it's no place for us."

"No—no, we must not think of it, Sam. This is a plot to murder me. I feel it—I know it, and——"

"You don't suspect old Williamson of being at the bottom of it, Charley?"

"No, no. I can't think that. It would be too ridiculous; but the sooner we get out of this the better. Even the ghost of the belfry is preferable—there! Sam Lovell, will you make a move now?"

Make a move?

Indeed, Sam needed no second appeal, for at the same instant the sound of an opening door was heard below, and——

Bang, bang, bang! came the elephantine step on the stairs.

Without an instant's hesitation Charles Oxford and Sam Lovell sprang up the main staircase, heedless of the darkness, two steps at a time, their movements hastened by hearing the terrible footsteps in pursuit.

Ghostly or human they were certainly following them, and without stopping even to think of their old terror, the ghost of the belfry, the boys rushed to the top of the house and gained the passage leading to the church once more.

Nor was this so easily accomplished, owing to the profound darkness which prevailed about them.

While groping around the room in search of the door, the footsteps gained the second flight, each step sounding like some huge cannon-ball dropped upon the bare boards.

It was enough.

Not for untold riches would either have lingered longer.

"To the roof! To the roof!" breathed Charley, as they dashed along the passage. "There we can at least see what dangers threaten us, and—— God help us! That thing has entered the passage now!"

It was so.

The loud slamming of the door behind them was heard at this instant, and——

Bang, bang, bang! came the elephantine footsteps close in their wake.

"Get ahead of me, Charley! Get ahead of me!" whispered Sam, bravely. "Let them catch me first, and you may escape."

"No, no, I won't! Let go of me, Sam Lovell, we are wasting time!"

And shaking himself free from Sam, who had tried to push behind him, Charley gave the magnanimous fellow a smart shove ahead.

In another instant the door was reached.

Sam threw himself against it and the door flew open, closing behind the form of Charles Oxford with a bang.

Scarce had this happened, when Sam gave utterance to a low cry of dismay:

"Look! Look!" he cried. "There it is again, and we've got to pass it or we shall never escape from this horrible place!"

The warning was unnecessary.

Blind indeed must Charles Oxford have been had he failed to see the sight which had brought his companion to an abrupt halt.

Out of utter darkness they had suddenly emerged into a broad, triangular beam of light, which illuminated all that came within the line of its radiance with the brightness of day.

This radiant triangle appeared to emanate from one central point of nucleus, which, as the boys could easily see, was directly at the foot of a flight of stairs, leading doubtless into the belfry above, while in the nucleus itself stood the ghostly bell ringer, again waving them back with extended hand.

CHAPTER VII.

EVEN THE GRIM DESTROYER SEEMS TO PLAY INTO THE MONOPOLIST'S HANDS.

"Is Mr. Ward at home?"

"Sure an' he is, sor. The master niver goes out in the night time. It's himsilf that can't walk, ye know."

"Hand him my card, please, and say that I wish to see him."

"Sure an' I will, sor. Won't ye be after walking into the parlor and havin' a sate?"

The card which the servant who had opened the door of the modest house in a west-side street carried off into regions unknown bore the name of "John J. Williamson."

The person who had rung the bell of the modest house was none other than that successful monopolist, the president of the Standard Axle Grease Co., who, passing through the door flung open by the retreating servant, now began pacing the floor of the modest parlor, glancing at the faded furniture, cheap pictures and mantel ornaments with a contemptuous sniff.

"Grease business must be bad if Ward can't fix up better than this," he muttered. "And to think that there was a time when I was this man's clerk, slaving myself to death on a salary of ten dollars a week. Well, well, times have changed, and that's a fact. Wonder what he'll say when I tell him about the money? But, hush! Here he comes!"

The creaking of wheels at this moment became audible in the hall. It sounded as though a baby carriage was being trundled along.

Mr. Williamson, not without some appearance of nervousness, straightened his shirt collar and backed up against the mantel.

From the house of Doxey, the detective, the monopolist had proceeded to Delmonico's, where he had partaken of a coarse dinner, lingering afterward for half an hour or so over his wine and cigar.

Just when Mr. Williamson had conceived the idea of calling on his old employer it would be difficult to state. Certain it is, however, that after leaving the establishment of the famous caterer, he had stepped into a cab and was driven direct to Mr. Ward's.

The strain upon the nerves of the president of the Standard Company was of short duration.

The creaking sound grew louder, and presently a wheeled invalid's chair was seen entering the parlor, propelled by an elderly, careworn gentleman, who turned the wheels with his hands.

Mr. Williamson sprang forward obsequiously.

"My dear sir, allow me to assist you," he cried. "Really, you must pardon my calling at such an unseemly hour, but——"

The chair was over the threshold now, and apparently oblivious to the close proximity of the rich manufacturer, the invalid gave the wheels a turn, forcing Mr. Williamson to jump to one side to avoid being taken across the legs.

"John, what do you want?"

The chair had stopped.

There was a cold familiarity about Mr. Ward's mode of address which galled the rich man's pride more than any other form of speech, no matter how harsh, could have possibly done.

"I wanted to see you in reference to that mortgage money, Mr. Ward."

"Well?"

In spite of his enforced calmness it was easy to see that Mr. Ward was much disturbed.

"Did you send it to my office by Charles Oxford this evening?"

"I did. I have been expecting the boy for hours. Why has he not brought the satisfaction papers? Why are you here, John Williamson, and what do you want?"

"I wanted to assure myself that you actually sent the money," stammered the monopolist. "Oxford's boy called at my office and stated that he had the money."

"Well, well, so he had."

"Perhaps so, but no one saw it. While my bookkeeper was getting the papers ready the boy suddenly called out that he had been robbed and——"

"What!" thundered the paralytic, turning deathly pale. "Robbed! God help me, it can't be possible! John Williamson, this is some trick to ruin me!"

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Ward. Business is business, and I must have my money. It is my opinion that Charles Oxford has stolen it, and——"

"Never! I would trust that boy with my life. Speak, man! Tell me what has happened! Where is Charles Oxford now?"

"How should I know where he is? He had the impudence to accuse me of taking your money, and I kicked him out."

"John, you would ruin me. Have you no mercy? No thought for my unfortunate condition? If Charles Oxford accused you of taking the money, I believe him. I—ah! A—h—h—h!"

One sharp exclamation, one long-drawn cry.

Then followed a curious rattling sound deep down in the throat of the invalid. The eyes closed, the head fell forward and all was still.

Mr. Williamson stood transfixed with horror.

Save the ticking of a little clock on the mantel there was no other sound.

"Whew! He's got another stroke!" he murmured. "It's the third one, too, and—— By the eternal! it has finished him. Yes, he is dead!"

Recovering himself, Mr. Williamson had sprung to the side of his old employer, hurriedly feeling heart and pulse.

"He is dead!" he repeated. "Dead, and the last semblance of opposition removed from my path. How fortunate! Even death seems to play into my hands to-night!"

He looked hurriedly about him.

Behind the closed folding doors female voices could be heard in lively conversation.

There was no one in the hall—not a soul to witness whatever he might choose to do.

Now, what Mr. Williamson did do—and it was the act of a coward—was to clap his hat on the back of his head and steal softly from the house.

"Let them find out for themselves," he muttered, as the waiting cab rolled away. "If the old fool has up and died it's none of my business. He's been half dead this ten years, and it's just my good-luck that Death should choose to-night to finish his job."

Then Mr. Williamson lit a cigar and settled himself back among the cushions as the cab rolled across town through the rain.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CHURCH.

Charles Oxford and Sam Lovell stood staring at the strange apparition overcome with horror.

There it was, just as they had seen it in the belfry.

The same tall, shadowy figure, the long, snow-white hair, the same quaint and curious dress.

Seen at the apex of that radiant triangle, standing at the foot of the belfry stairs, the sight was even more awe-inspiring than it had been on the roof, where the free air of heaven all about them had, at least, lent some courage to the frightened boys.

"Back! We must go back!" gasped Sam, leaping toward the spring door through which they had just emerged.

Had he forgotten the mysterious footsteps?

If so they were brought forcibly back to his recollection now, for as he opened the door the sound of that heavy tread burst upon them, nearer than ever, from out of the dark passage beyond.

Sam Lovell sprang away with a cry of terror.

The door sprang closed with a resounding slam.

"Charley, Charley, what shall we do?" he whispered, tremulously. "We can't go back, we can't go forward! Heaven help us, but I believe we are lost!"

At the same instant a loud clap of thunder broke above the old church, causing the structure to tremble from foundation to roof.

With a piercing shriek Sam Lovell covered his face with his hands, and would have dashed wildly off in the darkness of the loft had not Charley grasped him by the arm.

"Beware! Beware!"

"Heavens! Who spoke?" gasped Sam.

Had the sounds proceeded from the lips of the shadowy form before them?

Indeed, it seemed so.

"Hush!" whispered Charley, "it's the ghost! He's going to speak again."

Even as they looked the figure of the ancient bell-ringer advanced a step or two and waved his outstretched hand.

"Flee by the trapdoor! The lantern will guide you. Hesitate not one instant or you are lost."

The words, uttered in a deep, sepulchral voice, were followed by a second clap of thunder, louder and more terrible than the first.

As it rolled and rumbled over the roof above them, the weird form of the ghostly bell-ringer suddenly vanished from their sight.

"What shall we do? What shall we do?" muttered Sam, staring stupidly ahead at the light which could now be seen

to proceed from the bull's-eye lantern standing upon the lowest of the belfry stairs.

Bang, bang, bang!

Close behind the door the elephantine tread now reached their ears, striking new terror to their hearts.

It was Charles Oxford who rose to the situation.

"Come!" he whispered, pulling Sam in the direction of the lantern. "We are between two fires—one is as bad as the other. I propose to obey the ghost."

Sam offered no resistance.

He was incapable of making any.

Of far weaker mental capacity than his companion, every nerve in the boy's body was unstrung by what had occurred.

Now all these things occupied but an instant.

In our description we have consumed treble the time that actually elapsed from the moment the boys passed through the spring door to that of the disappearance of the ghost.

To gain the foot of the belfry stairs took no time at all.

As Charley reached for the lantern with trembling hand, he perceived in the floor before him an open trapdoor with a ladder leading down into the darkness below.

Just how they got down that ladder was something that neither of the boys could have told.

Nevertheless they did it, and, what is more, did it quick, for Charley had scarcely grasped the lantern than the spring door slammed with a violence which woke the echoes of the loft, and to their renewed terror the boys saw a man dashing toward the place where they stood.

He was a tall, powerfully-built fellow, his features entirely concealed behind a black mask.

More than this the boys could not have told, for they tumbled down the ladder somehow, knowing no more than that the trap had suddenly closed above them as they went.

Before they had time to get their breath a curious cry was heard above.

This was followed by a tramping sound on the floor, and then all in the same instant came a deafening crash of thunder, and the old church rocked like a ship in a storm.

"Oh, ah, ah! I can't stand any more!" howled Sam, clutching Charley's arm. "Take me away! I want to go home. I've torn the other leg of my new pants all to shreds!"

Despite the gravity of their situation, Charles Oxford could not help laughing aloud.

"Confound those pants of yours, Sam Lovell!" he exclaimed. "They'll be the death of me yet. If you ever expect to get home let go of my arm so that I can do something. Where are we, anyhow? There must be some way out—ha! What's this?"

It was a slip of paper which had been thrust through an aperture in the top of the dark lantern.

Charley, spying it, pulled the paper out and would have stopped to examine it had not Sam interfered.

"Great Scott! Don't waste time, Charley," he cried. "Where are we? Why are we stopping here? If you can't lead off give me the lantern and I will."

"We must be in the organ loft, I think," replied Charley, thrusting the paper into his pocket, and flashing the lantern about him. "Yes, that's where we are, and, by gracious! here are stairs leading down into the church. See, Sam! There won't be any trouble in getting out now. We can thank the ghost for this."

"Thank nobody—only let's get out," gasped Sam, making a dive for the stairs without even looking down into the deserted sanctuary, which was now revealed below them by the lantern's light.

Not so Charley, who paused for an instant to bend over the high rail of the organ loft.

He found himself looking into the body of the church, and saw that the seats had been removed, and that the floor was piled high with boxes and bales of goods.

"Ain't you coming?" roared Sam from the stairs. "I don't want to go down in the dark."

Charley now hurried forward, flashing the lantern up the ladder as he ran.

The trap was closed—he could see it plainly.

Though he strained his ears, listening intently, not a sound could now be distinguished overhead.

"Charley, Charley, for heaven's sake come on!" pleaded the voice of Sam Lovell from below.

Without further delay Charley joined his companion on the stairs.

"What were you waiting for?" whispered Sam, as they hurried down together.

"I wanted to see what sort of a place we'd dropped into."

"I want to get out—that's all I'm after. What was that paper you took out of the top of the lantern?"

"How should I know, when you wouldn't give me a chance to examine it. It proves one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"The old man we saw up above there was no ghost."

"Ghost or not I don't want to see him again. Once let me get out of this blessed old shebang, and all the money in New York wouldn't tempt me to enter it again."

"Ghosts don't carry dark lanterns, Sam Lovell."

"Perhaps not. But that thing with the black mask! Great Jew's-harp! I shan't get over this in a month. The door, Charley! What if it's locked?—and it's sure to be."

But it wasn't.

They stood just inside the main entrance to the old church now, with the door right in front of them.

With trembling hand Sam Lovell tried the knob.

It yielded—the great door moved back slowly.

To their intense relief, the friends felt a cold dash of rain in their faces as they stepped outside.

They stood at the top of the church steps in the open air once more.

Softly closing the door behind them, Sam Lovell dashed down the steps.

Charley shut the slide of the dark lantern and hastily followed.

Had they been dealing with the supernatural?

Now that it was all over the boy found himself sadly puzzled.

Had it been all some dreadful dream?

Indeed it seemed so.

And if a dream, then the awakening brought with it a sense of unspeakable relief.

Sam was already across the street, and stood leaning up against a lamp-post staring at the house which adjoined the church on the north.

This was Professor Forgey's Dancing Academy, and all in a blaze of light, just as they had first seen it; while through the open windows came the sound of tripping feet moving to the strains of the dreamy waltz.

"Charley, are we crazy?" breathed the boy as his companion joined him.

"Sam, I begin to believe it."

"Look at that house. One moment dark and deserted, a ball in full blast the next."

"Rats! Murder! What's going on in the old church tower? Holy scissors! I've got 'em on me again for sure!"

The shouts were from a belated inebriate who came swaying down the street toward the position occupied by Charley and Sam.

At the sound of his shout the boys turned and saw him stare for an instant at the belfry, and they start off and run down the street like mad.

"Charley—Charley! there it is again!" gasped Sam, directing his gaze upward.

And when Charles Oxford looked, there, sure enough, was the ghost in the belfry tugging away with all his might at the rope of the soundless bell.

It was enough!

As with one accord, the boys bolted off in the direction of Grand street as fast as their legs could carry them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

Charley went home with Sam Lovell that night, and occupied half his bed.

In the excitement of the hour the scrap of paper had been forgotten; nor had either of the boys remembered it until next morning, when in dressing Charley had accidentally come across it in the pocket of his coat.

Then he opened the paper and found that something was written on it.

"Revenge is sweet. Be revenged on one of the greatest scoundrels that ever trod the earth. Where is your father? If he is dead no power can bring him back to life again. If he lives he must be found. Who stole Mr. Ward's money? Do you want to know? Then don't leave your room or admit a living soul except your friend, Sam Lovell, until you hear further from he who pens these lines."

That was all there was to the letter—there was neither signature nor date.

What there was of it, though, was quite enough to puzzle Charles Oxford sadly, and even the ready-witted Sam was nonplussed for once when called upon to advise.

Breakfast eaten, Charles Oxford found himself as much perplexed as ever.

Was he doing right in keeping away from his employer? Try as he would the boy could not bring himself to believe it.

But on the other hand, would Mr. Ward or any else believe his strange story when it came to be told.

It seemed almost certain that no one would believe it.

And as he pondered over the adventures of the night, Charles was forced to admit that he would not believe the story himself.

Now it is only justice to state that no desire to shirk the responsibility of his carelessness weighed with Charley in the least.

It was the strong desire to learn something of his father's fate, which alone prompted him to pay any heed to the letter at all.

He felt like a man walking in a labyrinth—in a maze without beginning, without end.

What he had seen in the old church on Gwinnett street he had seen, and there was the mysterious letter to prove it.

One thing alone seemed certain—Mr. Mincks was mixed up in the affair, and probably Mr. Williamson at the bottom of it all.

Noon came and found him still lingering in Sam Lovell's cheap furnished room in the Eighth street lodging house, in a most unsatisfactory frame of mind.

The shriek of the twelve o'clock whistle served to rouse him.

"I can't stand it any longer, and I won't," he murmured. "Come what will, I must do my duty. I'm going to the office to report to Mr. Ward."

Report to Mr. Ward.

Ah, how little Charley dreamed that the kindly old gentleman had passed beyond the reach of either good or evil report.

When he reached the office he was horribly startled to find it closed, with a notice of Mr. Ward's death scrawled on a bit of paper and pasted upon the door.

"Dead!" breathed the boy, leaning heavily against the wall. "Dead! Dead, and perhaps I have killed him through my carelessness! Why, oh, why didn't I go straight to his house last night?"

Why, indeed?

But it was too late for regrets now.

Like one in a dream Charley hurried to the store where Sam Lovell was employed—a big dry goods establishment on Sixth avenue—and calling his friend to one side, whispered his sad news in his ear.

"Thunder! Here's a rum go!" said Sam. "What are you going to do?"

"I think I ought to go to the police—they must hear me. I'll tell 'em everything, ghost business and all——"

"Hush! hush! Don't speak so loud. If any of the fellows were to hear you talk about ghosts they'd want to know about it, and I wouldn't have it for a thousand dollars. You'd better go back to my room, Charley, and stay there quiet until I come."

"Do you think that's the best way?"

"I'm sure of it. But I can't talk any longer. There's a customer at my end of the counter—I must get back."

Charley left the store hurriedly.

There seemed to be no better plan than to take Sam's advice, since two heads were necessarily better than one.

He accordingly hurried down the avenue as far as Eighth street.

He failed to observe, as he turned the corner, two men who stood, engaged in earnest conversation, leaning up against an iron rail at the side doorway of a saloon.

Had Charley done so he would have been less startled when a moment later a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder from behind, pulling him to the right-about at once.

To his amazement he beheld the cold, sneering countenance of Mr. Williamson looking down upon him.

The man who had grasped his shoulder he had never seen before.

"That's the boy!" cried the manufacturer, jubilantly. "Arrest him. I charge him with robbing his employer, Hiram Ward."

CHAPTER X.

THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE OF JOHN J. WILLIAMSON.

Before dealing with the doings of that unprincipled monopolist, Mr. John J. Williamson, immediately following the encounter with Charles Oxford on Eighth street, let us follow his movements on the previous night a step farther, and relate a certain singular experience through which he was called upon to pass—in fact a very remarkable experience indeed.

It came about in this wise:

Upon leaving the humble dwelling of Mr. Hiram Ward, his mind undisturbed by one regret for the mean, cowardly part he had taken in the blow about to fall upon the stricken home, Mr. Williamson was driven to the — Club on Fifth avenue, which as every one knows, is one of the most exclusive and "high-toned" institutions of its kind in New York.

Possibly Mr. Williamson simply desired to show himself among his fellow clubmen.

It certainly had that appearance, for he remained less than half an hour, at the end of that time finding himself again whisking across town in the cab.

"If my movements to-night should be ever brought into question," he muttered, "there will be a dozen ready to swear that I was in the club house all the evening, providing I make the statement myself."

It was raining hard now, and had turned off cold and chilly.

Without giving a thought to the wretched cabby shivering on the box, Mr. Williamson drew his overcoat the closer and settled himself back upon the cushions for another smoke.

Past long rows of brilliantly lighted stores rolled the cab for a block or two, when, presto! the scene had changed, the shops grew dingy, the lights few and faint, and the garments of the few pedestrians who braved the storm were transformed from the costly and comfortable to the shabby and mean.

It was as though a magician's wand had touched houses and men, and yet it was all Fourteenth street; but then the cab was moving eastward, and the further east it moved the shabbier and more poverty-stricken everything became, until it seemed to grow too shabby even for cabby himself, and he whipped his horses around into one of the avenues—we believe it was Avenue C.

Down Avenue C to Houston street, along Houston street to Gwinnet, and—yes, it is in front of Professor Forgey's dancing academy that Mr. Williamson alights, dismisses cabby, and disappears behind the professor's door.

Come! surely Mr. Williamson is not a dancing man? For, if this were possible, a person of his age and social standing would certainly not deign to attend an "East Side" ball.

Probably it was other business which had brought the president of the Standard Co. to Professor Forgey's, for pretty soon he came out again, the sound of harp and fiddle following him through the opening door, and, buttoning his coat about him, walked slowly down to the corner of Delancey street, where he stopped for a moment and leaned against the post of a grocer's awning in the rain.

"He'll come—he'll be sure to come. Henry will not fail me." he muttered, looking up and down the street narrowly. "Well, I may as well slip in now as any time. If I am observed what matter? Surely a man is privileged to visit his own property at any time of day or night."

By this remark it may be assumed that Mr. Williamson owned the haunted church, for he walked leisurely toward it, and, ascending the steps, fitted a great brass key to the lock.

This was true.

Not only was the old church the property of the great monopolist, but he also owned Professor Forgey's Dancing Academy and half the houses on the block beside, and still he coveted more.

The church was used as a storehouse by a certain manufacturing concern, in which he had an interest. At night the door was supposed to be securely locked, of course, hence the surprise of Mr. Williamson when the key refused to turn.

Refused, because some one had opened the lock before him. Mr. Williamson, with a muttered exclamation, grasped the knob.

The door moved inward at his touch.

"Confound the fellow! I'll bounce him the first thing to-morrow!" he breathed with much vexation. "What business has he to go off and leave this door open. I'd like to know!"

Probably it was as well for the keeper of the storehouse that he did not happen to be around just then.

Closing the door and securely locking it, Mr. Williamson

now produced a dark lantern from beneath his coat, and proceeded to enter the body of the church.

"It can't be possible that any one is still at work here," he muttered. "That would play the mischief with my plans."

Then, flashing the lantern's light among the boxes and bales, he called aloud three times.

There was no answer.

Save for the sound of his own voice the interior of the church was as still as death.

"It is very strange," he murmured—"very strange indeed. I never knew Peter to neglect to lock the door before during all the time he has been in charge."

Strange or not, the door had certainly been unlocked when Mr. Williamson first tried it.

Much puzzled, the president of the Standard Co. now ascended the stairs to the organ loft, produced a second key, and fitted it to the lock of the door which communicated with the ladder leading to the loft above.

To his utter amazement—for he had every reason to believe it locked—this door was unfastened, too.

"Unlocked!" he breathed, excitedly. "What can it mean? Who can have been here?"

Until then he had rested in the belief that the only key to this door was in his own possession.

Now it seemed that this could not be so.

Throwing back the door Mr. Williamson peered up the ladder with a frightened air.

It was evident that he was much disturbed.

"Could I have left it unlocked myself?" he muttered. "No; it is impossible! I can't believe it. It must be—but no! I won't believe that."

Clapping his hand to his hip pocket to assure himself that his revolver was in its proper place, Mr. Williamson sprang boldly up the ladder, pushed up the trap and stood in the loft above.

"If there is any one here it will go hard with them," he thought. "Matters have gone too far for me to stand any interference now. No; there is no one here. I must have left the door unlocked, though it is hard to believe it, and—Merciful powers! What cheap trickery is this!"

Now while these thoughts were passing through his mind, Mr. Williamson had been moving about the loft, flashing the lantern's light in dark nooks and corners, and among the cobwebby beams overhead.

He had just reached the spring door communicating with the long passage destined to be impressed so strongly upon the minds of Charles Oxford and Sam Lovell later in the evening, when all at once a slight sound from behind suddenly attracted his attention.

Mr. Williamson turned on his heels abruptly, giving utterance as he did so to the startled exclamation noted above.

Yet why should he have been frightened?

It was only a man standing on the second step of the stairs leading up to the haunted belfry, seen dimly in the shadow cast by the lantern's light.

It was not the ghostly bell ringer, but a much younger person. A tall, spare man, with pallid features—they would have been instantly recognized by Charles Oxford as those of his missing father, could the boy have been present then—who stood perfectly motionless, staring at the monopolist with cold, pitiless eyes.

In his terror Mr. Williamson almost lost his hold on the lantern.

Tottering backward he pressed heavily against the partition for support.

"John! How came you here?" he gasped, hollowly. "How—Heavens! he is gone!"

Even as he spoke, the figure on the belfry stairs vanished like a puff of smoke.

With a stifled cry Mr. Williamson pulled himself together and sprang toward the stairs.

They were utterly deserted.

So was the belfry when, a moment later, he had sufficiently nerved himself to examine it.

Above him hung the great bell motionless from the beam, and through the open sides of the structure the night wind dashed the rain in his face coldly, as Mr. Williamson realized that he was alone.

"What does it mean? Can John Oxford be dead?" he murmured, hollowly. "Can it be possible that I have seen a ghost?"

Without pausing another instant, he hurried back to the loft, unlocked the spring door and disappeared within the passage beyond.

CHAPTER XI.

A FRIENDLY HAND.

"Take your hand off me!"

"Not much, young man. We've been looking for you all the morning," cried the man who had grasped Charles Oxford's shoulder. "Grab him, Mr. Williamson. Don't let him give us the slip. You'll yield quietly, my friend, if you know when you're well off."

But Charley, instead of heeding these words, began kicking and struggling for all he was worth.

Of course it was foolish, but set upon thus suddenly the boy did not have time to consider.

Possessed as he was of a hot temper he became fairly blinded with rage to think that Mr. Williamson should thus accuse him in the open street.

"You miserable old liar! Do you dare to say that I took Mr. Ward's money?" he cried. "Take that, will you!"

And, tearing himself free from the grasp which held him, Charley struck out blindly, accomplishing in one blow far more than he had ever dreamed.

It happened, as luck would have it, that there came, just at that particular moment a baker trundling a little bread wagon along the sidewalk. As Charley's blows took effect in that portion of Mr. Williamson's anatomy known as the "bread basket," among the sporting fraternity, it was highly appropriate for that gentleman to go sprawling backward over the bread wagon and this was precisely what he did.

In an instant the wagon was overturned, carrying the baker with it on top of the monopolist, and amid a perfect shower of leaves, rolls, and pies.

"Help! I'm killed! Help, for goodness' sake!" bawled Mr. Williamson, struggling with the baker.

It was a ridiculous situation, and it drew a hooting crowd in an instant.

The man who had accompanied Mr. Williamson let go his hold on Charley and sprang to his assistance. Then Charley, finding himself free, dashed back toward Sixth avenue at the top of his speed.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" roared Mr. Williamson, shaking himself free from the baker and scrambling to his feet.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" echoed the crowd.

As he sprang across Sixth avenue and ran into one of those narrow streets leading off Greenwich avenue, Charley could hear a hundred footsteps following him, and his ears rang again with that ominous cry.

Now for the first time the boy realized the folly of his action.

Could he have chosen any better way of declaring his guilt than by acting just as he had?

And when he cast a hurried glance behind all New York seemed to be in hot pursuit, while men sprang to intercept his progress on ahead.

In another instant Charley was struggling in the grasp of a burly butcher, who came darting out of a neighboring store.

"Here he is, mister! Here he is!" cried a dozen voices, as Mr. Williamson and the detective—for it was a detective, one of Mr. Doxey's men at that—came panting up.

"Didn't make much by that move, did you?" snarled the monopolist, seizing Charley by the collar and shaking him violently. "Here, take him, officer. Better handcuff the young villain, I say."

Then, before the boy's eyes, all seemed to grow dark as midnight, and Charley fell in a dead faint at Mr. Williamson's feet.

"Great Scott! We've done it now!" cried the detective, bending over him as the crowd pressed around.

And while they still pressed about him Charley opened his eyes.

"Now, then, what ails you?" demanded the detective roughly.

"I—I don't know. I guess I fainted."

"I should say you did. Can you stand?"

"I think so."

"Get up, then, for we must get out of this. Here, help me lift him up, Mr. Williamson. Get back there! Get back, or I'll run a dozen of you in!"

The crowd fell back.

Staggering to his feet, Charley felt himself seized by either arm and hurried off down the street.

The crowd followed, shouting and hooting.

"For heaven's sake let us get away from these people!" whispered Mr. Williamson. "See, they are fighting on ahead there among themselves. We can never get through that crowd."

It seemed as though a perfect army of men, women and children had suddenly sprung into being around them, and, just as Mr. Williamson had said, on in advance a fight was in progress—two men pummeling each other on the sidewalk in front of a row of shabby, red brick houses, with green shutters and low stoops.

About the combatants another crowd had gathered, and almost before Charley had time to realize what was going on he found himself torn from the grasp which held him by the pressing throng, pushed up two low steps in front of one of the red brick houses, and pinned there without being able to move an inch.

What was it all about? Where was Mr. Williamson? Where was the detective?

Now was his opportunity, if he could only avail himself of it, and—

It was in the midst of these reflections that Charles Oxford suddenly felt a hand grasp his coat-tail from behind and pull him backward through the now partially opened door.

CHAPTER XII.

GROPING IN THE DARK.

"Hush—hush!" breathed a deep voice in Charley's ear as the door closed noiselessly behind him. "Don't make a sound—I am your friend—I will save you from that bloodhound if I can."

Strong language, and all the stronger for being spoken in utter darkness.

Who the speaker was Charley could not even guess.

It seemed to him marvelous that the hall should be so dark in broad daylight, and yet as he now turned and faced his mysterious friend there was not light enough for him to even determine whether he had to deal with man or woman—nor could he have told save for the voice.

Without the shouts of the crowd seemed to grow louder, and just as the door was shut behind him, bang! bang! came the fists of some one against the panels, followed by a furious ringing of the bell.

"Who are you? Why have you pulled me in here?" whispered Charley, the faintness coming over him again.

"Charles Oxford. I would save you from the consequences of your own folly," answered the voice from out of the darkness.

Bang! bang! bang! Harder than ever were the raps upon the door.

"My folly? I don't understand you."

"You were ordered to remain in your room. You disobeyed that order and this is the result."

Jing—a—ling—a—ling—a—ling! Jing—a—ling—a—ling—a—ling! Louder and louder jangled the bell above their heads.

"Open this door! Open this door!" came the hoarse shouts from without. "Open in the name of the law!"

"Listen!" spoke the unknown, hurriedly. "If you fall into Mr. Williamson's hands now you will sleep to-night in the Tombs, and to get freed may prove no easy matter."

"But what shall I do? They'll have the door down in a moment now."

"No, they won't. When that door was made men did their work honestly. Those fellows outside have got all they want to do to break it down. You run up the stairs—they are right in front of you—at the top you will find a door—stay, though. They may break in and may search the house. Charles Oxford, you follow me."

There was something soul-sustaining in the voice of this invisible being—a certain commanding influence in his very presence which Charley did not even attempt to resist.

Then, as the knocks were repeated and the bell jangled again, and still again, Charley felt himself grasped by the hand and drawn gently but firmly up a flight of stairs to a landing above.

It was still totally dark, and when he knew by sounds that a door had been opened, and expected that now at least light would break upon them, it did not.

All the boy could make out was that he was being dragged across a room—that another door opened, that some one had pushed him into darkness as impenetrable as that of the grave itself—that a door slammed, and he was alone.

Alone—yes! But what did it all mean?

Who was this person who knew his name, his private affairs, who seemed to take so strange an interest in his fate?

Outside the footsteps of the unknown could now be heard retreating. Then all at once came a crash, and the sound of many feet rushing up the stairs.

"Heavens!" thought Charley. "They've broken in the door."

All doubt that such was actually the case was speedily removed, for in another instant a multitudinous trampling was heard, and above it the voice of Mr. Williamson speaking in loud, imperious tones.

"Where's the boy that ran into this house?"

"I don't understand you, sir," answered the voice of Charley's preserver. "Who are you, and by what right have you broken down my door and admitted all this rabble? Leave my house instantly, or I'll summon the police."

And alone and in utter darkness Charley remained listening in a tremor of excitement.

"They'll find me as sure as fate," he thought. "All this will go against me most frightfully when it comes to be told."

Meanwhile, loud, angry voices continued to be heard without.

"Summon the police. The sooner the better," the voice of the detective was heard to say. "All we want is the boy who disappeared behind that door down-stairs, and we are bound to have him, too."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Then I'll show you. Stand one side. I'm going to search this place."

"By what authority?"

"It's none of your business, but I'm a detective. My authority is the law of the land."

"Does the law give you the right to break into the house of a respectable citizen?"

"When the respectable citizen harbors a criminal—yes. Stand one side, I say."

"Some one's going to pay for this," Charley heard the unknown answer.

Then followed a tremendous tramping, an opening and shutting of doors.

Every instant Charley expected to be dragged from his place of concealment, but he was not.

Could it be dark in the room outside now?"

It seemed impossible.

Then why was no attempt made to open the door behind which he stood concealed? Why did no ray of light penetrate that concealment?

Long before this Charley had discovered that this was only a narrow closet, and that the door possessed neither knob nor lock.

By and by those without passed into another apartment, and the boy breathed more freely.

Then, as time went on, he could hear tramping above him, below him in the halls, and upon the stairs.

At last these sounds ceased, and a loud hammering was heard, followed after a little by a solitary footstep ascending the stairs.

Had Mr. Williamson and the detective taken their departure?

Charley thought so, and ventured to push gently against the door, but it refused to yield.

While he was yet hesitating he was startled by hearing a deep voice pronounce his name.

"Charles Oxford!"

Should he answer.

The voice did not sound like that of the unknown.

It might be some trick of Mr. Williamson's—some dodge of the detective's, and then—

"Charles Oxford, come out! Press hard against the door."

It was the unknown, and somehow his voice now sounded strangely familiar.

Hesitating no longer, Charley pushed against the door, which immediately yielded to his touch.

Greatly to his astonishment he found himself in a lighted room, face to face with that crusty old accountant, Mr. Mincks!

CHAPTER XIII.

DETECTIVE DOXEY THROWS UP THE CASE.

On the morning following his strange experience in the old church, Mr. John J. Williamson was at the office of the Strand and Axle Grease Company as early as seven o'clock.

This, let it be remembered, was the morning of the day

upon which Mr. Williamson undertook to arrest Charles Oxford, and let it be noted, also, that the great monopolist was in anything but an agreeable frame of mind.

The hands were trooping into the factory as he hurried up the office steps. Poor, half-starved, ragged, dejected-looking creatures they were, too, but what cared Mr. Williamson for that so long as the money came rolling in?

It was too early, of course, to expect Detective Doxey, and even Mr. Mincks, usually prompt, had not yet arrived.

Passing directly into his private office, Mr. Williamson removed hat and coat, and for a few moments busied himself with his morning mail.

Then when the hum of machinery began outside in the factory he arose, walked to the speaking tube, whistled through it and called:

"Send Henry in to me."

"Well, did you deliver my note?" he inquired, somewhat harshly, as the boy made his appearance.

"Yes, sor. I giv' it to de bloke on de Bowery las' night."

"What do you mean by 'de bloke'? I told you to deliver the note to Charles Oxford in person."

"Well, and didn't I? He's de bloke I mean. I couldn't find his name in de d'rectory, and I don't b'lieve I'd'er got onter him at all if it hadn't been for Mincks."

"What?" cried the president of the Standard Company in surprise. "Did you tell Mr. Mincks that I gave you the note for Mr. Charles Oxford? Why, you little fool!"

"Hole up, boss. I didn't tell Mr. Mincks nawthin'. You telled him yerself, didn't yer?"

"I—not at all."

"Then he's a liar. I was walkin' up an' down de Bowery in de rain, an' had most given up all hope of finding de feller, when all to wonst I heard somebuddy hollerin' to me outer one of dem yaller cabs."

"Well, well?"

"Well, it was Mincks, de ink-slinger."

"What did he say?"

"Why, he says, says he, de feller you want. Henry, is on de nex' block in front of de Paris Varieties. Better go down an' give him Mr. Williamson's letter, but you don't want to let him question you none, an' so dat he won't I'll follow along in de cab. Soon's ever you've put de note in his hand you skip for de cab, an' I'll be ready with de door to let you in."

"And you did this?" questioned Mr. Williamson, the intonation of his voice expressing his amazement.

"Cert'ny. I slipped the letter inter Charles Oxford's hand, an' den skipped for de cab."

"Well, and what then?"

"What den? Why, Mincks let me out corner of Foyst aivner an' Eighth street, an' I went home."

"Did he try to pump you while you were in the cab?"

"Never said a blame word. 'Twouldn't a-done him no good if he had. Dere ain't no flies on me. But I say, boss, didn't you put de old ink-slinger onter de lay? Come, now, honest, I did de best I could."

"There, there, it's all right, Henry. You go back to work. You did the best you could, no doubt, and I won't forget you on Saturday night."

"What's de matter wid sein' me now?" answered the boy, with a cunning leer. "I got blame wet las' night, an' you might forgit it on Saturday, yer know."

"Go—go!" cried Mr. Williamson, angrily, as the outer door at that moment opened and a stylishly-dressed gentleman came bustling in.

It was Detective Doxey.

Henry vanished like a shot.

"Ah! good morning, Mr. Doxey," said the manufacturer, coming forward and shaking hands warmly. "You are much ahead of time, but it don't matter. I am all ready for you. Shall we go over the story of that singular little occurrence again?"

"I am early, but I have much to do to-day. Yes, tell me all about the robbery, please. By the way, I suppose you have heard that Hiram Ward was dead?"

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Williamson, pretending to be greatly astonished. "No! it cannot be so."

"Why not? It is so. It is in all the papers this morning."

"Why, I left him quite as well as usual last night."

"You left him! Were you at his house?"

"Yes; after leaving you I thought I ought to inform him of the affair, and I did."

"Had Charles Oxford been there?"

"No, and he won't go in a hurry, in my way of thinking. I'm afraid the fellow has left the city by this time; there can be no doubt that he stole the money himself."

"Tell me about it," answered the detective, quietly.

Then Mr. Williamson told a story which Mr. Mincks, had he been present, would have recognized at a glance as very far from the truth.

"That was the way of it, was it?" said Doxey, when he paused at last.

"It's just as I tell you."

"Do you want my opinion as to who took the money?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, then, you shall have it—Mincks!"

"Mincks! Nonsense! Why, Mr. Mincks never came out from behind the railing at all."

"How do you know, if you were inside your private office, as you say you were?" asked the detective, quickly.

Mr. Williamson looked confused.

"I know Mincks to be as honest an old fellow as ever lived," he answered, after a little.

"How do you know it?"

"Ain't he my bookkeeper?"

"How long has he been your bookkeeper?"

"Why, about three weeks," replied Mr. Williamson, reluctantly; "but then, you see——"

"Ah!" said the detective. "Ah! Yes, I see. It was undoubtedly Mincks."

"I tell you, you are talking rubbish, Doxey," was the angry reply. "I only wish Mr. Mincks was here to cast the lie in your teeth, and——"

"Sir! Lie! Did you use the word lie?"

"No, no, I——"

"But you did, sir. I cast the imputation back in your teeth, sir. I shall have nothing more to do with this case, sir, since you seem determined to set up your judgment as superior to mine, sir. Find out who stole the money yourself, sir. Good day."

"Doxey! Doxey! One moment! I beg your pardon. I——"

But the door had slammed, and the great detective was gone.

"Confound it all! what shall I do now?" muttered the monopolist. "I shall have to get a new man into the business, and I don't want to do that. What does he mean by accusing Mincks? And, above all, what does Mincks mean by interfering with my affairs? One thing is certain—Mincks is up to mischief—Mincks must go."

He was still pacing the office in perplexity when—it was ten minutes later—the bent form of the aged bookkeeper shuffled in at the door.

Mr. Williamson did not even give him time to get his coat off.

"Mr. Mincks," he said, sternly, "what were you doing last night on the Bowery in a yellow cab?"

"Sir?"

"I think I spoke plainly, sir. What were you doing last night on the Bowery in a yellow cab?"

"Mr. Williamson, I do not understand you. I have neither time nor money to spend on cabs. Last night I went directly home."

"I want no explanations, sir," answered the monopolist, loftily—he seemed to forget that he had just demanded one—I have no further use for your services, Mr. Mincks; you can go."

"But, Mr. Williamson, I——"

"Go!" thundered the manufacturer. "Go!"

And Mr. Mincks went.

He made no attempt at further speech, but left the factory at once.

When he reached the corner of Third avenue he turned and shook his fist at the building.

"You old scoundrel," he muttered. "You old scoundrel! I'll show you up in your true colors yet. You have discharged me, but no matter. There are more ways of killing a cat than by choking it to death with cheese."

Apparently Mr. Mincks had not taken his discharge very much to heart, for he proceeded to the nearest cigar store, invested a dollar in Havanas at twenty cents each—which was very extravagant for a man out of a situation—and lighting one of them, walked leisurely down the avenue, acting altogether as though he didn't care two pins whether he was discharged or not.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MINCKS.

"Good evening, Charles Oxford! I'm afraid you found it somewhat unpleasant being shut up there so long in the dark."

Charley was amazed.

He could not help it.

There sat the old bookkeeper by the side of a table on which burned a student lamp, shedding its soft radiance upon the well-furnished apartment—sat as calmly and quietly as though he belonged there. But then, for all Charley knew, perhaps he did.

"Was it you who rescued me from those people?" stammered Charley, staring about him in wondering surprise.

"No, it was not," replied Mr. Mincks, quietly. "It was another person, no matter who just now. It is enough to say that he acted under my instructions. You have had a narrow escape, young man, but for the fact that the closet door is papered just like the wall you would undoubtedly be in the station at this present moment, which would have given an awkward turn to affairs, to say the least. Sit down, I want to talk with you a bit."

"You speak of my affairs as though you were interested in them," said Charley, more puzzled than ever.

"So I am—so I am."

"I don't know why you should be. You, or that boy you sent to me came near getting me into trouble last night."

"I wrote no letter—I sent no boy."

"Yes, you did. I saw you in the yellow cab."

"That is true. Still I repeat I sent no boy. The boy who handed you the letter was sent by Mr. Williamson, not by me."

"It's all the same."

"Indeed, it is not."

"Ain't you Mr. Williamson's bookkeeper?"

"I am not."

"I know better than that."

"Don't be too sure, boy. To show you how much in error you are, I may as well tell you that Mr. Williamson discharged me this morning. No, I am happy to be able to state that I am not now in his employ."

Charley stared.

"What did he discharge you for?" he asked, curiously.

"No matter. Now about this money business. Mr. Ward is dead, and you are accused of taking the money with which he intrusted you to pay off that mortgage. You say you didn't take the money, and I believe; but if you did not take it, who did?"

"I'm sure I can't tell."

"Then I can. Mr. Williamson took the money himself. Directly behind that part of the desk on which you laid the pocketbook is a secret panel communicating with his private office. He set the dog on you, and while you turned to kick him opened the panel and took the pocketbook. It's all as plain as day."

"Then I'm going to the police and lay a complaint against him at once," cried Charley, springing to his feet. "The old scoundrel! To think of it! He ruined my father and would ruin me."

"Softly—softly. Sit down again, Charles Oxford. Suppose you go to the police? They will only arrest you. How are you going to prove that what I say is true?"

"Can't you prove it?"

"Not at all. It is only my theory."

"Oh!"

"You see now how small a foundation you have to build on. Now tell me what you mean by my getting you into trouble last night."

"Excuse me. Since you say you did not write the letter I received, I'd rather not."

"You had better."

"I can't do it, sir."

Now the fact was Charley felt that he could not bring himself to tell the strange happenings of the previous night to any one, least of all to this man, who, for all he actually knew to the contrary, might still be in Mr. Williamson's employ.

"Let me go," he said, abruptly. "I have had trouble enough about this money. I'm going to the police now, come what will."

"Don't be a fool!" cried Mr. Mincks, angrily. "Don't be a fool. Sit down."

"I shan't. I am going to leave this place. I am much obliged for what you have done, but——"

"But you are afraid of me? Is that it?"

Charley was silent.

"You don't answer, boy."

"I want nothing to do with you. I can't trust any one now."

"Charles Oxford, do you want to find your father?"

Tears sprang to the boy's eyes.

"God knows I do," he answered, brokenly. "If you know anything about him, tell me. I——"

"I know nothing more than you know at present. By this time to-morrow, perhaps I may know much. If you can't trust me, go, by all means, but take an old man's advice, return to the room of your friend, Sam Lovell, without the slightest delay, and once there, upon no account leave it until you hear from me."

"How in the world did he know that Sam was my friend?" thought Charley, as he hurried through the streets a few moments later on.

For the mysterious Mr. Mincks, without speaking another word, had hurried Charley out of the house by way of a back gate, which communicated with a vacant lot in the rear of the house.

"You'll hear from me in due season," he said at parting. "Until then, lie low."

Really, Mr. Mincks was a very mysterious man, indeed.

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLES AND SAM LOVELL ATTEND A BALL.

"A letter for me!" exclaimed Sam Lovell, in answer to the landlady of the Eighth street lodging house, who had knocked at the door. "No, by gracious, it's for you, Charley. Wonder if it can be from that mysterious old creature, Mincks?"

It was evening again, and Charley and Sam were in the room alone. Still hesitating as to his proper course, Charley had not yet seen the police.

Sam had had supper sent in from the restaurant, and over tough beefsteak and watery tea Charley had told his tale.

"You see what you got for going out," had been Sam's first remark. "Depend upon it that Mincks is your friend—that he knows more than he wants to tell."

"Then why didn't he speak out. I don't like hints. You can say what you will, it was he who got us into trouble last night."

"I'm not so sure of that," answered Sam. "Unquestionably he wrote the letter, in spite of his assertion to the contrary; but perhaps his plans didn't work as he had intended, and——"

And right here came the knock which brought with it another letter.

Was this one also from Mr. Mincks?

It was a problem.

The letter was certainly in the same handwriting as the one thrust upon Charles Oxford in the Bowery, but it bore neither signature nor date.

Its contents seemed to corroborate Sam Lovell's theory to a remarkable degree.

They were as follows:

"They played me false last night, but it will not happen again. It is highly important that I should see and speak with you. To-night the P. J. Foley Association hold their first annual ball at Forgey's. Dress yourself up and attend it. The negro has been dismissed, and there is no fear of your being recognized. You will not see me at first, but before the evening is out I shall find means of making myself known. Come early, and come alone."

"Sam, what shall I do?" asked Charley, much puzzled, as he laid the letter down.

"I'd go," replied Sam, positively, "but I wouldn't go alone."

"What! Venture again to that dreadful place?"

"Yes, if Mincks orders it, and I'm sure it is Mincks. I tell you, Charley, that old fellow knows what he is about every time."

"But we don't know it to be Mincks. Besides, he says come alone."

"Oh, that's not to be thought of. Do you know I think we acted like a couple of fools in skipping off the way we did last night. We ought to have seen the police at once and had them go into the house or the church. For my part, I intend to see this thing through."

"There's no such thing as ghosts—we were tricked by some one. Let's go to the ball, Charley, and see what comes of it. No harm can possibly happen to us in a public place like that."

"Do you forget that horrible secret passage? How the house was first inhabited and then deserted?"

"Yes, yes, but when we saw it at last from the street there

were the dancers again. There's no use talking, that passage took us to some other place."

"Why not see the police now? I've been on the point of it all day, but——"

"But you didn't. And now we'd better wait until we know more. Mystery—I love it! Why this is just like a play or a novel. There's no use talking, old man, you and I are going to P. J. Foley's ball."

And go they did.

Sam in a full dress suit, Charley in Sam's precious new pants—darned by the little tailor around the corner during the day—and a somewhat worn Prince Albert coat which had been one of Sam Lovell's most precious treasures in its time.

Upon reaching Professor Forgey's they found the ball in full blast, since it was already past nine o'clock.

"Don't you feel kinder skittish? I do," whispered Sam, as they hurried up the steps. "By thunder, Charley, I hope I've not talked you into the wrong thing."

Then, as he rang the bell, Sam threw a glance at the haunted belfry above them.

It was deserted now.

The great bell hung there attached to its beam as quietly as though it had not moved in a dozen years.

And though he said nothing, Charles Oxford had already begun to feel entirely disgusted with himself.

Was he not acting the part of the fool and the coward in all this coming and going. Clearly it had been his duty when rejected at the police station to go to headquarters and tell his story, let the consequences be what they might, instead of giving heed to anonymous letters and chasing about with Sam Lovell, who was a rattle-brained fellow at best.

However, there was no help for it now, for the door had been opened, and sure enough by a white man instead of the darky who had acted as keeper the previous night.

Next thing Charley knew Sam bought the tickets, and the friends found themselves surrounded by the youth and beauty of the Thirteenth Ward.

There was that noted politician, P. J. Foley, himself, in a claw-hammer coat and white cravat, with a dazzling diamond as big as a duck egg—we speak metaphorically—glaring from his immaculate shirt front.

There was Professor Forgey, the proprietor, urbane and bald, who flitted here and there like a youth of sixteen, looking to the comfort of his guests; and there, likewise, were pretty girls by the dozen, gay youths with tight-fitting trousers and boutonnieres, to say nothing of sundry elderly red-nosed ward workers, who would have looked decidedly more in place at some political gathering than in the festive scene they now failed to grace.

"Don't see Mincks anywhere, do you?" whispered Sam, as they roamed from room to room.

"Indeed I don't," answered Charley, "and, what's more, I don't expect to. I'm afraid we've made a mistake in coming here—that it's all a trick to get me into trouble again."

"Oh, pshaw! How can anything happen to us with all these people about? By and by, if Mincks don't come, I'm going to watch my chance and have a look at that upper room with the secret passage. Meanwhile, I've found a fellow I know who is going to introduce me to that blonde there in the corner. Come on, and he shall present you, too."

"No, no, I'd rather stay here; I don't want to dance."

"I do, then, and, what's more, I'm going to dance with the blonde. Don't you move, now, until I come back."

When Sam came back it was after a waltz with the blonde, a fair factory maiden of sweet sixteen.

Charley was not at the place in Professor Forgey's front parlor where he had left him.

Neither was he in the back parlor, nor in the halls, nor the rooms up-stairs, for Sam searched every one.

Searched, yes; and searched again. Every room in which the dancing was in progress was visited; every face closely scanned.

The fact was Charles Oxford was not among them.

Let the explanation be what it might, Charley had strangely, mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT SAM LOVELL AND PROFESSOR FORGEY HEARD IN THE HAUNTED ROOM.

"Now, confound my buttons!" thought Sam Lovell, "there's something almighty strange about this."

Well, and so there was.

The waltz with the blonde had not occupied twenty minutes at the most. Time enough for a dozen things to have happened to Charlie Oxford, to be sure, but then why had he made no sign?

"Can't you find your friend?" inquired the blonde, who chanced to pass, leaning on the arm of a red-nosed politician.

"No, I cannot. You saw me speak to him—you remember his face—have you seen anything of him in the rooms?"

"Not a thing. I should have noticed him at once if I had."

"I can't understand it," stammered Sam, much perplexed. "Most likely he's gone out for a ball," put in the politician. "You'll find him over to Coffey's place, I make no doubt."

"Oh, no, that is impossible; my friend don't drink."

"Don't drink!"

The politician stared.

If Sam had informed him that his friend did not breathe he could not have shown more surprise.

"No, he don't drink at all. I doubt if he ever tasted a glass of liquor in his life."

"Oh, you go—West! Yer can't give me no such kid as that. Come, Moll, they're fiddlin' up. We'll try another turn."

And Sam?

What was he to do?

To waste time looking for Charles Oxford in saloons would accomplish nothing; and, moreover, the doorkeeper, a very intelligent fellow, had assured him that Charley had not passed out into the street.

"I recollect him as being with you," he said, in answer to Sam's eager questioning. "If he had passed out I should have certainly remembered it. Besides, for the last fifteen minutes or so no one has passed either in or out this door."

"Is it not possible that he might have gone out by the basement door?"

"It is possible, but altogether improbable. Hadn't you better see Professor Forgey, and inquire for him?"

"What shall I say?" thought Sam to himself, as he moved away. "I can't tell him about Williamson and the ghost and all the rest. Confound it! I've got things all in a mess again, and all through that confounded Mincks!"

He had seen nothing of the old bookkeeper, and scarce knowing what was best to do, hesitated to inquire of the doorkeeper whether he had seen any such person about.

"I'll ask Forgey," he thought. "Something has certainly happened to Charley, and if I'm going to be any help to him I've got to be quick about it. Ah! here comes the professor now."

A little man with shiny bald pate, dressed in a claw-hammer coat and ruffled shirt, came smiling down the stairs.

It was the dancing master himself, moving from room to room, looking to the welfare of his guests.

He was a pleasant little man, whose face beamed all over when Sam spoke to him.

There was, indeed, something about him—Sam could not have told what—that made the troubled dry goods clerk tell him more of his story than under the circumstances might have been prudent or wise.

"What's this? What's this?" questioned Professor Forgey. "You and your friend here last night—entrapped up-stairs and by a secret passage into the church loft next door. Impossible! And yet——"

"Well, what is it?" asked Sam, seeing that the professor hesitated. "I tell you, my dear sir, that there is something wrong in all this. When we came back through the passage your house was deserted."

"Deserted!"

"Yes; there wasn't a particle of furniture in it—it was as dark as pitch and——"

"Impossible! We kept the dancing up until three o'clock."

"But my friend—have you seen him?"

"I have not, to my knowledge," replied the professor. "But then, from your description, I do not know him, and as for this Mr. Mincks, I know him well enough, and I can positively assure you he has not been in my place to-night."

"You know Mincks?"

"Indeed, I do. This house belongs to Mr. Williamson, the axle grease manufacturer. Mr. Mincks is his bookkeeper. He has been here several times to see about repairs and collect the rent."

"Was he here last night?"

"He was not."

"And the darky who acted as doorkeeper—perhaps he may be able to shed some light on all this. Can't I see and question him?"

"Why, the fact is," replied Professor Forgey, "I do not even know the fellow's name. My regular doorkeeper is sick, and this man came along and I engaged him. This morning he didn't show up. But, see here, young man, hadn't I better send for a policeman? Between ourselves, I don't like this business at all. I've always tried to keep a respectable place here, and if all talk of secret passages, ghosts and disappearances were to get out it would just ruin my trade."

"But what do you propose?"

"To go up-stairs and investigate. Between ourselves, strange noises have been heard in one of the rooms up there before now; and to-day I heard——"

"Well, what did you hear?" asked Sam, as the professor paused again and looked a good deal confused.

"I heard that a ghost had been seen in the belfry of the old church next door. All the neighborhood is talking about it."

"An old man with long white hair, dressed like a revolutionary soldier?"

"Precisely."

"But surely you ought to know something about it, professor. If there is a secret passage——"

"Excuse me. I don't hire the top floor. Neither do I live in this house. I only use it for a dancing academy. The top floor is and always has been locked. The house next beyond me also has been closed and vacant ever since I came here. It looks to me very much as though——"

"Gentlemen, will you choose partners for a waltz quadrille?" shouted the master of ceremonies, and at the same moment a number of ladies came running down the stairs, putting an end to the possibility of further speech.

"Come with me, Mr. Lovell. I'm going to examine into this," whispered the dancing master. "Stay, though. Remain where you are for a moment until I inquire if any one has seen your friend."

And the professor vanished, leaving Sam alone and greatly perplexed.

Should he go for the police?

To do so might only be to bring about Charley's arrest, in case he had taken a notion to explore the top floor, which was certainly possible—and in fact Sam found himself at a loss to account for his disappearance in any other way.

"I'll have a look up there before I make any move," thought Sam. "The professor seems like a very decent fellow. Whatever happened to us last night, surely no harm now. It may be, after all, that Charley has only gone up there to have a look, and—ah, here comes the professor back again!"

"Mr. Lovell, there is something very strange in all this," whispered the dancing master, who now came hurrying downstairs. "Your friend, or at least some one strongly resembling him, was seen to go up to the top floor not ten minutes ago."

"He was?"

"There can't be any doubt about it. Several saw him, among whom were the musicians at the head of these stairs."

"Who was with him?"

"That was the strangest part of it. He was alone."

"Let us go up there at once, then," said Sam, eagerly. "I suppose he wanted to have a look at the room into which we were entrapped last night, though he had no business to go without me, and——"

"And I don't like the word entrapped, sir," interposed the professor. "Moreover, your friend has no business prowling about in the upper rooms of this house. If the strange story you tell me is true——"

"Which I can assure is the case."

"I repeat, if the story is true you ought at once to have informed the police. Follow me, young man. I propose to find out what all this means."

The little dancing master was on the stairs now, and Sam Lovell followed him.

They hurried past the musicians, past the wall-flowers in the hall and up the flight communicating with the top floor.

"This door should be locked," said Professor Forgey, trying that nearest the head of the stairs. "I've been in this house a year, and never saw the room but once, when Mr. Williamson showed it to me. Then there was nothing inside here but bare boards, cobwebs and dust."

But the door was not locked now, that was certain.

On the contrary, it yielded at once to the pressure of Professor Forgey's hand upon the knob.

The gas-burner in the hall, which the professor had taken the precaution to light, showed them nothing but a deserted

interior, with no trace whatever of the door communicating with the secret passage.

In fact, there was no door save the one by which they had entered, and the room seemed to have no windows at all.

"You see," said the dancing master, "there is nothing here—but stay! Some one has been stirring up the dust on the floor. I can see their footprints, and—— The Lord preserve us! What was that?"

It was a wild, eldritch cry, which at that instant filled the room.

A cry so strange, so horrible in its intensity, that it brought Sam Lovell's heart into his mouth.

He was fully prepared to see the whole side of the room fall down, disclosing some ghostly vision, but nothing of the sort happened.

Then all at once—and it was before either Sam or Professor Forgey had so recovered themselves as to be able to utter a syllable—mutterings in smothered voices, and all was still.

CHAPTER XVII.

ENTRAPPED.

Not the slightest intention had Charles Oxford of allowing himself to become separated from Sam Lovell when that gay and festive gentleman had gone waltzing off with the blonde.

Quite the contrary.

Could he have done so, with any decency, Charley would have greatly preferred leaving Professor Forgey's at once, and returning to Sam's room, there to wait for some more certain token from that man of much mystery, Mr. Mincks.

Call it hesitation, timidity, indecision—anything you wish—but somehow or other the more Charley thought the situation over, the more confidence he felt that the crusty book-keeper would somehow or other work matters around in such a way to prove his innocence and fix the responsibility of the loss of Mr. Ward's \$5,000 where it rightfully belonged.

Such were Charley's thoughts as he sat watching the dancers moving about the parlor to the step of that dreamy waltz by Waldteufel—"My Queen."

Such and similar feelings still possessed him, when all at once he heard a voice whisper close behind him:

"Oh, I'm so glad I've found you at last!"

Of course Charley instantly turned his head in the direction of the voice.

There, at a few feet from the chair in which he sat, stood a young, girlish-looking figure, with dark hair and eyes, white dress, cut high at the neck, white satin slippers on rather sizable feet, while in the right hand a large feather fan was held in such a manner as to conceal the lower part of her face, leaving, in fact, little visible save the eyes.

Was it she who had spoken?

For an instant Charley was inclined to doubt it, since there was no one near the girl but himself.

And if she had spoken?

"Of course, her remark was not intended for me," thought Charley. "I never saw her before, and——"

And just here the voice was heard again:

"Oh, I'm so glad I have found you, Mr. Oxford! I've been looking for you all over the house."

"Did you address me, miss?" began Charley, wonderingly, half rising as he spoke.

"Yes. To who else? Your name is Oxford. You are here in answer to a letter you received, directing you to attend the P. J. Foley Association ball."

"I certainly did receive such a letter."

"I know it!" whispered the girl, joyfully. "I know I could not be mistaken. You were so carefully described to me, and—and—— Oh, Mr. Oxford, I don't know what to say to you, I don't, indeed."

She had lowered her fan now, but only for an instant, revealing as she did so, a coarse, though somewhat attractive face.

Now had Sam Lovell been on hand, he might have been more cautious, as for poor Charley, he fell into the trap at once.

"Who described me to you, miss? Was it Mr. Mincks?"

He never noticed the look of triumph which swept over the face behind the fan as she replied:

"Oh, yes, Mr. Mincks."

In an instant Charley was on his feet and stood beside her. "What is it?" he whispered, eagerly. "Is Mr. Mincks here? Does he want to see me?"

"He is here—he is up-stairs."

"Up-stairs!"

"Yes; in one of the unoccupied rooms at the top of the house. He sent me to ask you to come up and—and—oh, my gracious! Mr. Oxford, I feel so embarrassed that I really don't know what to say."

"Why should you feel embarrassed?"

"Why? Gracious me! I should think you'd understand—speaking to a gentleman I have never been introduced to. I never felt so embarrassed in my life."

"Really I do not understand you, miss. If Mr. Mincks has sent you to call me, what harm can there be in that? Can I not see him at once? Perhaps you do not understand how much depends—"

"Oh, yes, I do. I understand it perfectly. You are to follow me to where he is waiting for you, but you must not let any one know that you are following me—that would never do at all."

"How can it be avoided?"

"I will go up-stairs ahead of you. After a moment you are to follow on to the top floor. You will there find me waiting for you, and I will conduct you to Mr. Mincks."

This seemed simple enough, and Charley said so.

Indeed, he was at a loss to understand why the girl should display the hesitation she did.

"I will call my friend Sam Lovell," he said, "and we will come up-stairs at once. You can't think how anxious I am to hear what Mr. Mincks has to say."

"Call no one," answered the girl, in a hurried whisper.

"Are you then not here alone?"

"I am not. My friend came with me."

"But that was contrary to the order in the letter."

"Nevertheless he came, and I should prefer to have him present at my interview with Mr. Mincks."

"It cannot be. If you persist in this you will not see Mr. Mincks. It is enough to expect me to guide one strange gentleman up-stairs. Have you decided? It must be alone or not at all."

"But who are you, at least tell me that?"

"I shall tell you nothing."

"Think! I can easily go up-stairs without you, now that I know that Mr. Mincks is awaiting me. I have had one severe experience on the upper floor of this house, and I don't want another."

"If you do not do as I direct you will find no one. Come, be quick, Mr. Oxford. I am going to leave you now."

"Lead on; I'll follow," said Charley, desperately.

"Surely," he thought to himself, "no harm can come to me in a house so filled with people as this."

With a saucy smile the girl glided away from him.

Looking through the door, Charley saw her white figure moving up the main stairway to the floor above.

Where was Sam?

He could see him nowhere; but then the parlors were so crowded with merry dancers that this was in nowise strange.

"I'll go," thought the boy, and, moving through the door, in a moment more he had gained the top of the second flight.

The hall was deserted.

From below the strains of the waltz shot upward. He could hear the talking of the dancers as they glided across the well-waxed floors.

Casting his eyes about him, Charley now took a hurried survey in the dim light projected upward from below.

There were four—yes, five—doors opening upon the hall. Door communicating with front and back chambers, front and back bedrooms, and a fifth between the two chamber doors.

No sign of the girl, however, was anywhere to be seen.

"Which door did the darky take us through last night, I wonder?" thought Charley. "I'll be blest if I can remember. It seems to me it must have been the door of the back chamber, though I can't be sure for—"

"Mr. Oxford! Mr. Oxford!"

The fifth door had been opened slightly, and there was a light behind it.

Through the opening Charley could see the face of the fair conductress, peering forth.

"Is Mr. Mincks in here?" he whispered, springing forward.

"In there," replied the girl, pointing toward an inner door, which stood partly open, as she threw back the one behind which she stood. "Go on—I'll follow and close the door behind us to make all safe."

Wholly unsuspecting of evil, Charley obeyed.

As he crossed the room he did not fail to observe that it was carpetless and bare of furniture, though for the moment this made no impression on his mind.

No sooner had he passed through the inner door, however, than it was slammed suddenly behind him.

To his horror Charley found himself standing in utter darkness—alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GHOST OF THE HAUNTED BELFRY ASSUMES STILL A DIFFERENT FACE.

"An' did yez see it, Mrs. Finnigan?"

"Faith an' I did that, Mrs. Maguire. It was twinty fate high, if it was an inch!"

"An' all in white!"

"True for yez. White was no name for it, only it had no shate thrown about its hid like the ghost me grandmother's fust cousin wanst saw in the bogs of Ballinasloe."

Din—a—ling! Ding—a—ling!

The bell of Mrs. Finnigan's little cent shop in Gwinnett street, opposite the haunted church tinkled violently, and who should walk in but Mr. John J. Williamson, the great grease monopolist, who looked and acted for all the world as though he owned the whole place.

And in truth so he did.

Not only was he the owner of the house in which Mrs. Finnigan's cent shop was situated, but he owned also the tenement next door in which Mrs. Maguire had kindly consented until the next rent day—the good woman never paid rent—to deposit her household goods.

It was the evening of the ball of the P. J. Foley Association at that sacred temple of Terpsichore. Professor Forgey's Dancing Academy, the particular time being a few moments after Charles Oxford had consented to accompany the supposed messenger from Mr. Mincks into the unoccupied room up-stairs.

No sooner did the two women, who, in common with all the neighborhood, were discussing the remarkable appearance of the ghost in the haunted belfry, perceive the manufacturer than their tongues were stilled at once.

"It's the boss," whispered the lady opposed to rent-paying, in sepulchral tones, and while Mrs. Finnigan slipped out from behind the counter, bowing and courtesying as she wiped a chair with her apron, Mrs. Maguire slid out of the door and disappeared.

"Are we alone?" demanded Mr. Williamson, curtly, the instant the door closed behind the retreating form of the woman.

"Sure an' we are, yer honor."

"Good! Have you heard from your daughter?"

"I have, your honor. She's done it, so she has."

"And the boy?"

"Sure she enticed him up-stairs into the room you showed her, opened the door lading to the saycret passage and locked him 'inside.'"

Good! Good!" whispered Mr. Williamson, greatly excited. "When was this? I am a few moments later than I intended to be."

"Not five minutes has Mary Ann been gone, yer honor. She jest slipped acrosst the street permiscuous like, and told me to say as how all was right."

"Mary Ann is a smart girl, Mrs. Finnigan. I shall see that she is well paid for this. There, give her that ten-dollar note when she comes home to-night, and as for the rent of this shop, I shall instruct my agent not to annoy for the rest of the year."

"Thank yer honor. God bless yer honor."

"Are people talking about the ghost in the belfry, Mrs. Finnigan?"

"Indade, an' they are, sor, and well they may be. I seen it mesilf only last night, an'—"

"And you want to keep them talking, Mrs. Finnigan. Of course, you understand that this ghost business is only part of my plans."

Then the shop bell tinkled again and Mr. Williamson passed out, leaving Mrs. Finnigan staring at the ten-dollar note, wondering whether it was good or bad.

Now it is not polite to call a man a liar.

Especially a man so rich and respected by all who did not know him as he who had just left Mrs. Finnigan's shop.

Yet when Mr. Williamson stated that the ghost of the haunted belfry was part of his plans he had lied most outrageously, since he was as much in the dark as to the true nature of this singular appearance as were the good people of Gwinnett street themselves.

Everything had gone wrong with the monopolist that day.

In the first place, he had quarreled with Detective Doxey, just at the time he expected to use him; next, he had been forced to discharge Mr. Mincks, who had been exceedingly serviceable; lastly—and this was more disappointing than all the rest—he had failed to hold Charles Oxford, when, by the merest accident, the boy he strove to persecute had fallen into his hands.

Foiled in this, Mr. Williamson had laid a fresh snare to entrap the son of his former business rival, through the aid of Mrs. Finnigan, whose husband—now dead—had done dirty work for him in the past.

No; Mr. Williamson could not account for the ghost.

While to Charles Oxford and Sam Lovell it had appeared in the form of an officer of Revolutionary times, to the manufacturer it had taken quite another shape.

To his eyes it had borne a startling resemblance to Charles Oxford's father, which was all the more singular, since—but stay! we are getting ahead of our story, which will not do at all.

To slip across the street and up the steps to the door of the haunted church again, was Mr. Williamson's next move.

To his astonishment, he found the door unfastened for the second time, which fact, since he himself had seen the porter employed in the storage room lock it earlier in the evening, disturbed him very much indeed.

"What can it mean?" he muttered, as he hastily slipped inside and turned the key. "Can any one have learned my secret? It seems impossible. Yet I can positively affirm that Peter locked this door to-night."

He was very pale, but very firm and determined looking, as he stole up the stairs which communicated with the loft beneath the haunted belfry, and he examined his revolver in the light of the lantern which he carried, to make certain that it was in shape for immediate use.

Ghosts were something that Mr. Williamson did not believe in. Yet what he had seen he had seen, and there was the testimony of the neighbors beside. Could the statements of Charles Oxford and Sam Lovell have been added to the rest, it is probable that the monopolist would have felt even more disturbed than he did.

"I can't account for it," he muttered, as he closed the trap-door leading into the loft, "and the strangest part of it all is that when I followed those boys through the secret passage into this loft last night the place was lighted. I saw the light as I opened the door, and yet when I stepped in all was as black as ink, and the boys were gone."

Mysterious mutterings?

Could Mr. Williamson's have been the elephantine tread Charley and Sam had heard behind them?

Darkness, fear and imagination will magnify almost anything in the shape of sight or sound.

Perhaps it was the manufacturer's present state of mind which magnified the sound of his own footsteps now, for certainly they were as heavy as lead.

"Let the young cub wait," he muttered. "He can't escape me, and if he is scared to death, why so much the better. I am going to take a look into the belfry before I make another move."

Directing the rays of his lantern before him, Mr. Williamson now commenced the ascent of the stairs leading up to the belfry, his right hand pressed upon his revolver, ready for any emergency which might occur.

But he found nothing in the belfry.

Nothing whatever but the bell.

He had turned the slide of the lantern as soon as he ascertained that the place was deserted, lest its light should attract the attention of those in the street below.

"This ghost business is all nonsense," he muttered, as he stood staring at the bell above his head. "Some one is trying to trap me, and I must be wary. To-night I must finish up this business. I will pull the old church down and put up tenements since it no longer safe. Ha! now I see why this bell could be swung, as the people say it was, without ring-

ing. Another evidence of trickery! I must hurry. I have no time at all to lose."

It was the clapper.

Some one had tied it up against one side of the bell by means of a rope which passed around the beam.

Here the hand of man was plainly visible, and Mr. Williamson started to descend the stairs, his face having the air of one who had taken a stern resolve.

He had just reached the last step when a sound from above attracted his attention.

It was exactly as though some one had leaped into the belfry from the roof.

Turning instantly, the monopolist directed his gaze upward.

To his amazement he saw a man standing in the belfry looking at him—a man whose garb was that of a Revolutionary officer, but whose face was the face of his discharged bookkeeper, Mr. Mincks.

Mr. Williamson did not pause to look twice, but instantly discharged his revolver.

The shot was without effect.

When the smoke cleared away there stood Mincks as motionless as a statue, with one long finger pointed toward him, while his face, which was deathly pale, bore a stern and reproachful look.

It was too much for Mr. Williamson.

Probably he had overestimated his courage.

Certain it is that he turned and fled down the stairs with all possible speed.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY ONCE MORE.

To describe the sensations of Charles Oxford when he heard the snap of the secret door behind him is an undertaking which we cannot hope to carry out.

First rage, then despair—then the determination of battle with the unknown enemy who had thus entrapped him for the second time to the death.

Pounding on the door and shouting Charley soon discovered to be useless.

Clearly the girl was a mere tool; whether of Mincks or his employer it mattered not.

Just as clear was it that she had taken her departure, for there was no response to all Charley's knocks—not even a sound.

He was alone and in utter darkness—at the mercy of an unseen foe.

Now that it was too late, he regretted bitterly that he had not followed Sam Lovell's advice.

If Sam were only with him there might be some hope that his sharp wits would be equal to the emergency. The great mistake was in assuming the letter to have been written by Mincks—in coming to the dancing academy at all.

"It's my own fault," murmured Charley, as he leaned against the wall, after calling himself hoarse and knocking until his knuckles ached.

"If I had only minded Mr. Mincks the result would have been different. He told me to keep housed, and I didn't do it. I don't believe the girl ever heard of Mincks. It was me who put his name into her mouth."

Now this was true, but it did not better Charley's situation one iota.

Something must be done, and that quickly.

And as Charles Oxford was not the boy to long despair, he cast about him for some plan of action with all the courage he could muster up.

He had no matches, consequently light was out of the question.

Neither was he armed with anything more potent than his fists, yet he bravely started to grope his way along the passage, in the faint hope that he might succeed in making his way to the loft of the old church, and escape by the trap-door, as he and Sam had done on the previous night.

But which of the secret passages was he in?

He was certain that there were two of them.

If it was the one into which the negro had ushered them, then it could have but one ending—the loft. If the other, he must determine which direction led toward the lot, which toward the mysterious house.

Then Charley remembered that the door opened by the negro had communicated with one end of the passage, and by moving backward and forward a few steps, he soon discovered that the passage in which he now stood was open in two directions.

Plainly it was the second passage, and equally so that he had entered it at the side. Which direction, then, should he choose?

It was a serious question, and after some deliberation Charley moved to the right.

No obstruction offered, and he walked along until he suddenly came hard against a door, which, upon being tried, yielded to his touch.

All was dark—very dark.

Still, though he could see nothing, he seemed to know instinctively that he had entered the house of mystery instead of the loft of the old church.

Should he advance or retreat?

Either course seemed equally dangerous.

As he stood hesitating, holding the door open, the sound of a heavy tread fell upon his ears, coming seemingly from the passage way down toward its end.

It startled Charley horribly.

It also caused him to immediately advance. It was the elephantine step again, and still behind him, and in great terror he closed the door and pushed ahead, gaining the top of the flight of stairs.

With the closing of the door the footsteps ceased.

Still Charley made no move to return.

At the top of the stairs he paused, in a terror of uncertainty, when all at once a soul-stirring sound shot up from below.

It was a wild cry of agony—a fierce, impassioned shout for help.

Immediately upon it followed the sound of heavy blows—one—two—three—four—five of them, and then all was darkness and silence once more.

Now new horror seemed to seize the boy. It was though his hair was rising upon his head. A strange, tingling sensation was experienced, beginning at the back of the neck and extending down the spine until it reached the very soles of his feet.

"What can it mean?" he murmured. "Am I dreaming? Do I imagine? No! No! It is no imagination. There it goes again!"

Again—yes, and louder, ten times louder than before was repeated the cry, and following upon it closely came the sound of the blows again.

In speechless horror, his brain fairly reeling under the mental strain forced upon it, Charles Oxford turned and started to grope his way back to the passage.

"Better anything than the horror of this house," was the thought which crossed his mind, when suddenly it seemed to him as though some strange and ghastly exhalations were rising about him—smells which seemed to stifle him so that he could scarcely get his breath.

Then a pistol shot was heard as though fired at a great distance, and to the already overwrought fancy of the youth there appeared in the blackness before him a light which sent that frightful, creeping sensation shooting down his spine once more.

What was it?

The door had not been opened, no one had entered—or rather, there had been no footfall—and yet there was light, pale and unsustained at first, then waxing brighter and brighter, until it seemed to take to itself shape, and—oh, horror!—that shape was the shape of a man!

Paralyzed with fear, Charley continued to gaze upon it—gazed because it seemed to him then as if all the forces of heaven and earth would have been insufficient to have torn his gaze away.

It was not a man—it was only a light—and yet, while only a light, it still appeared to the watcher as a man. And as he stood watching, the light appeared to grow and grow until its dimensions seemed gigantic, and its highest part far above him, and yet the light possessed apparently no radiance beyond itself; the walls of the room, the door, the windows remaining invisible as before.

A deathly coldness now seized the boy.

He was shivering, his teeth were chattering, but worse was yet to come.

As he still gazed from out of the light far up toward the ceiling it seemed to him that two great eyes were glowing—eyes whose fierce glances chilled the very marrow in his bones.

It was more than human endurance could stand.

With a low cry of horror, Charley tore himself away, turned, and all heedless of the darkness, fled down the stairs.

Not until he had gained the hall below did he turn and look behind him.

The light was still visible.

It stood at the head of the stairs—those terrible eyes were there also, peering into his own.

But the spell was broken—the fascination gone.

To say that Charley was no longer a prey to fear would be too much, perhaps; but he was again master of himself.

To return up the stairs was a thing not to be thought of. To attempt to escape to the street from the hall door or by the parlor windows, he knew from his former experience would be but a futile effort—a waste of time.

Meanwhile neither the cry nor the blows had been repeated.

Gathering such courage as he could, Charley made one dive down the basement stairs.

The light did not follow.

Though he looked bravely behind him, he could see nothing of it; and groping his way through the darkness he vainly tried to open the basement door.

It was fast.

So was the door leading into the basement.

Assuming the arrangement of the house to be similar to most New York dwellings, Charley started for the back door at the other end of the hall.

He had not gone ten steps, when, all at once, the soul-stirring cry was repeated, so close now that it seemed fairly shouted to his ears.

Bang, bang, bang!

It was the sound of blows following close upon the cry, and just beside him another and dimmer light pierced the gloom, revealing a door at the top of which was a small square of glass.

The light came from behind the glass, and with it came a vision which caused Charley to forget in an instant all that had happened before.

It was the face of a man pressed against the glass.

A face pale and ghastly, crowned by a mass of tangled, matted hair.

It was also the face of one whom Charles Oxford had known and loved.

The face of one whom he had firmly believed to be numbered among the dead.

CHAPTER XX.

PROFESSOR FORGEY SEES THE GHOST.

"My stars!" exclaimed Professor Forgey, in a frightened whisper. "What was that?"

"Hush—hus!" said Sam. "It's the ghost. It's coming again!"

"Ghosts! Stuff—nonsense! Don't talk about ghosts to me, young man. I've had enough of this mystery business. It will ruin my dancing academy if it keeps up much longer. You just stay here until I come back. We'll soon find out what all this means."

Then Professor Forgey hurried off downstairs, leaving Sam alone; and while the instructor in the art of the light fantastic was absent not a sound of any sort was heard.

Yet the sounds behind the partitions had been realities.

Sam had heard them, and Professor Forgey had heard them.

There was no break in the paper wall that Sam could discover, although in his own mind he felt certain that behind this wall ran the secret passage communicating with the vacant house next door, through which he and Charley had passed the evening before.

Now, in drawing this conclusion, Sam Lovell was right, as we know.

Furthermore we may as well mention right here that the noise they heard was made by Mr. Williamson and no one else.

In his fright, dashing away from the mysterious apparition in the haunted belfry, Mr. Williamson had somehow managed to extinguish his lantern.

Hurrying through the secret passage, he had slipped and fallen. This was the noise first heard by Sam and Professor Forgey. The muttering and subsequent noise were the result of Mr. Williamson's effort to find his lantern and to pick himself up.

Presently the dancing master returned, bringing with him a stalwart policeman, and in addition no less a personage than the great P. J. Foley himself, the pride of the ward, and the patron of the ball.

"Say, young feller, what's all this 'ere about ghosts and haunted belfries?" questioned the politician, swaggering up to the other end of the room where Sam now stood closely examining the paper on the wall.

But Sam never answered him.

The fact was he had made a discovery in Professor Forgey's absence which interested him then a great deal more than anything J. P. Foley could say.

"Here's the door!" he exclaimed. "The paper laps over it but it's here. Don't you see the crack where I've torn it away!"

It was even so.

There was the door plain enough now.

It was papered exactly like the wall, and fitted so closely that the only wonder is that Sam managed to discover it at all.

"It's a door, sure enough!" cried Professor Forgey, in astonishment. "But it was on the other side of the room that we heard the noise you know."

"Perhaps there is another door," said Sam.

"I believe this to be the one through which the darky pushed us last night. One of the secret passages is behind here, you may be sure. You know the premises better than I do—would it not be likely to lead into the loft over the church?"

"We'll soon see where it leads to," interrupted the policeman, and, putting his shoulder against the hidden door, he forced it in, revealing, as Sam had predicted, a dark passage opening off behind.

"I'll go first!" cried Professor Forgey, bravely. "He had brought a lantern with him from below stairs, and without a particle of hesitation he now shot ahead and started along the secret passage.

"Softly! softly!" whispered the policeman. "If you go tramping along like that you'll spoil everything. You'd better give me the lantern and let me go ahead."

But the professor refused to listen to anything of the sort.

He continued to advance, the others following.

In a moment he had come to a second door, opening which they found themselves in the loft above the church.

Scarce had they entered, when from the dancing master a low cry escaped.

"Look! Look! It's a ghost!" he whispered.

There, sure enough, gliding off toward the right of where they stood, was a tall figure in the dress of a revolutionary officer.

In an instant it had passed beyond the range of the light cast by Professor Forgey's lantern and had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

For a single instant only the face at the window remained visible.

Then it vanished, and the light vanished with it and all was still.

Scarce had it disappeared, when Charley, with a cry, sprang toward the cellar door.

"Father! father!" he shouted. "That face! Oh, heavens! am I mad? What can it mean? What are the secrets of this terrible house?"

Was the boy mad, indeed?

Mad or sane, he had not failed to recognize the face behind the pane set in the cellar door.

It was the face of his missing parent, and no one else.

Now, in moments of great excitement time is nothing.

From the moment when Charley first beheld his father's face until the end came, the time was actually very short, yet the moments seemed like years.

Way in the upper rooms, Charley could hear that heavy tread moving over the carpetless floors drawing nearer and nearer.

Terrifying as it had been but a moment before, it seemed now to possess no terrors at all.

No; Charley could think only of his father now.

Had he actually seen him, or was that face but another of the delusions of this horrible house?

And though Charley mentally asked himself these questions, he never even stopped to think of their answers.

He flung himself against the cellar door, fumbled for the knob, found it, and strove to wrench it open with all his might.

The door refused to yield.

"Father! father!" called the boy kneeling before it and pressing his lips to the keyhole.

At the same instant a wild, demoniacal laugh was heard behind the door, repeated again and again.

Mingling with it was the sound of footsteps descending the cellar stairs.

Then the light gleamed faintly through the square of glass. Gleamed for an instant—then disappeared.

"Great heavens! what can it mean?" thought Charley. "I saw him—it was my father's face. Oh, if Sam was only here; if there was only some one to help me. Father! father! father!"

In his excitement Charley struck upon the door frantically, calling his father's name.

And the heavy tread above stairs?

It was coming nearer.

Charley neither heard nor heeded it.

All his thoughts, his soul, his whole being was centred upon the mystery which lay concealed behind the cellar door.

Hark!

Again the wild cry had sounded, and with it came rapid footsteps now ascending the stairs.

The light came again, also the square of glass was illuminated, for the second time there flashed upon Charles Oxford the vision of his father's face.

"Open the door! Let me out!" cried a well-remembered voice. "I won't stay here any longer! I hear my son Charley calling me. Let me out, I say! Let me out!"

It was no delusion!

It was his father's face—his father's voice.

Leaping back for a spring, he, with all the strength he could muster, flung himself against the cellar door.

CHAPTER XXII.

AND THE LAST.

If Mr. John J. Williamson had only been contented with a million—and the great axle grease maker was worth all of that—it would have been better, far better for him in the end.

But Mr. Williamson was not a man of a contented disposition.

The more he had the more he wanted.

When he was a boy working for Hiram Ward, side by side with Charles Oxford's father, at a salary of three dollars a week, he thought if he could only get six he would never ask for anything more.

When Mr. Ward gave him six he wanted eight; when he was advanced to eight nothing short of ten would satisfy him, and so it had been ever since.

"When I am worth a hundred thousand dollars, I'm going to retire," Mr. Williamson had once remarked to a friend.

He did nothing of the sort.

When the hundred thousand mark in the manufacturer's fortune was turned, he never even thought of retiring, and now that he was worth a million he was just as greedy as ever—was constantly striving for more.

It was because Mr. Williamson had more money than he knew what to do with that he bought the old church and the buildings about it.

Professor Forgey's house and the house next door to it had originally been one structure—the parsonage of the church—and when the alterations were made to change them to dwellings, the builder had left the secret passages which connected with the loft of the church.

Why they had been constructed in the first place not even Mr. Williamson knew; but there they were, and the heavy tread heard by Charley had been none other than Mr. Williamson's own.

In fact when Charley threw himself against the cellar door his enemy had just reached the foot of the parlor stairs.

Now when Charley dashed against the cellar door he meant business.

Nothing short of oak could withstand the pressure, but it happened that this was precisely the wood the door was made of; and, what was worse, it was so constructed as to open outward, rendering all his efforts to force it in vain.

Meanwhile the shouts inside continued.

Again and again Charley threw himself against the door, when suddenly a light shot up behind him, and before he had time to realize what had happened, Mr. Williamson came dashing through the hall.

"So, so, Charles Oxford! I have you at last!" he cried, dropping his lantern, flinging himself upon the boy and pressing him to the floor. "You will pry into my secrets, will you. I'll teach you! Malediction on that crazy idiot! He's making noise enough to wake the dead!"

Bang, bang, bang! came thumping upon the inside of the cellar door.

"Let me out! Let me out!" shrieked the voice, waking the echoes of the hall.

"Let me up! Let me up! you miserable scoundrel. Let go my throat! I—a—h—h—h!"

Thus the fierce cry while the boy struggled to free himself from the deadly clutch upon his throat, cut short and dying into an inarticulate gurgle as Mr. Williamson's fingers closed tighter and tighter still.

Already the boy's face was purple.

Another instant, and——

And what?

Nothing!

Not in the next, but in that self-same instant from out of the gloom behind a tall figure swiftly glided—sprang upon the strangler and wrenched his hands away.

His dress was the dress worn by the ghost of the haunted belfry, the face was the face of Mr. Mincks.

The arm was an arm of iron, and as with one hand he flung Mr. Williamson from him, with the other he tore away wig and beard.

"Doxey—the—detective!"

From the pallid lips of the trembling wretch the words came hoarsely:

"Aye! Doxey, the detective!"

Click-click—was the snapping of handcuffs—the rush of many feet—down the stairs and into the hall dashed Sam Lovell, P. J. Foley, Professor Forgey, and the policeman.

Then a mist gathered before the eyes of Charles Oxford and he knew no more.

"Do you feel better, my boy?"

"I—I—think so. What has happened to me?"

Charley lay upon a sofa in one of the upper rooms of Professor Forgey's dancing academy.

There were many gathered around him as he opened his eyes.

He who spoke was a tall, well-made man, with clear-cut, determined face, while just behind him stood Sam Lovell, supporting a wretched-looking object, much emaciated, who was gazing wildly about him from face to face.

Even before Doxey, the detective, could answer, Charley had leaped from the sofa and staggered across the floor.

"Father!" he cried, flinging himself forward.

Then the arms were extended, and the emaciated figure pressed the boy against his breast.

"My son! Charley! My son! Oh, God be praised!"

Probably there never was a case which created such downright, genuine excitement in New York City as the case of John Oxford, the long-missing manufacturer, now so strangely brought back to life.

They found him in the cellar of the deserted house in Gwinnett street, and when Doxey broke open the door and released him it was thought—yes, and for some time afterward—that his reason was hopelessly gone.

He raved, moaned, and flew at Mr. Williamson in fury until his eyes rested upon the unconscious form of his son, when all at once he sank beside Sam Lovell, who was trying to restore Charley to consciousness, and wept like a child.

"It was the sight of his son that did it," said the doctor, who was summoned by Professor Forgey.

"It struck him just right, and aroused his mental faculties into action. But for this the man might have remained a maniac to the end of his days."

Who could have been kinder than Doxey the detective?

Turning his prisoner over to the policeman, he called a carriage, and had father and son conveyed to his own house, nor did they leave its shelter until long after the elder Oxford had

fully recovered both health and reason, and all mystery surrounding this strange case swept away.

It all came out at the trial of Mr. Williamson, when it was shown that the great monopolist was not only a very grasping man, but a very foolish man as well.

Through his paid agents he had secured his business rival and conveying him to the old church in Gwinnett street, had conveyed him into the cellar of the deserted house by way of the secret passage, where for months he had kept him concealed.

He remembered only the first few days of his confinement, after which, concerning all that had happened, his mind was an utter blank.

Doxey, the detective, did it.

From the first his suspicions had been turned against Mr. Williamson, and this had induced him to disguise himself and enter the employ of that grasping individual under the name of Mincks.

Not only had he seen the manufacturer take the pocketbook through the secret panel from the desk upon which Charley had inadvertently laid it when the dog flew at him, but he was prepared to swear it, too; and the result was that Mr. Williamson was convicted of grand larceny, and sentenced to Sing Sing for seven years, the other indictments being allowed to drop.

Then the directors of the Standard Axle Grease Co., who were really respectable men, met, and after much discussion, bought in the factory, and knowing little of the business themselves, made Charles Oxford's father president and Charley himself bookkeeper and cashier.

Sam Lovell left the Sixth avenue dry goods store and became salesman for the company which, at last accounts, was—to use a vulgar phrase—"making money hand over fist;" for all these events happened way back in the '70s and we are now in the 20th century.

Somebody got hold of the old church and pulled it down, and Professor Forgey's and the house next door along with it. The dancing master opened a grand establishment on Fifth avenue, and the Thirteenth Ward has forgotten him. P. J. Foley was elected to Congress, and——

And here we are prosing away without offering the slightest explanations of how Doxey came to play the ghost.

Well, it is true, but we can't help it.

Doxey was the ghost—he frankly confessed it.

When Charley, taking advantage of a favorable moment, asked an explanation, Doxey only put his fingers to his lips and smiled.

"Look here," he said, "business is business. If I was to tell all my secrets I wouldn't have any. All I've got to say is that your remarkable experiences in that house were all due to imagination. I hung about that church for days trying to find out what Williamson came there for, and—but pshaw! Where's the use in talking? I have forty-seven disguises. Mincks was one of them, the ghost was another. Ha! ha! ha! How I scared you and Sam Lovell that night. But for me, though, Williamson would have caught you. I heard him coming and opened the trapdoor."

"But why didn't the bell ring when you pulled the rope?" asked Charley.

"Because it had a big hole in it," answered Doxey.

But down in the Thirteenth Ward the people to this day believe in the ghost of the haunted belfry as firmly as they believe that the Hon P. J. Foley is the greatest man on earth.

Next week's issue will contain "THE HOUSE WITH 3 WINDOWS," by Richard R. Montgomery.

CURRENT NEWS

Amsterdam papers are discussing the advisability of enlarging and deepening the North Sea Canal and dispensing with the locks at Ymuiden, thus giving a free waterway without locks from the North Sea to Amsterdam. Only by doing this, it is said, can Amsterdam hope to check the steady inroads on her trade made by the rapidly progressing port of Rotterdam, which has sea level canal connections.

John Sweers, living near Elkinsville, Brown County, Ind., is a patron of a rural route and has a mail box for the reception of mail. A few weeks ago he deposited a letter in the box, but the carrier failed to find it. The second time he mailed a letter and again it was missing. Again he deposited a letter, and this time he kept watch. To his amazement he saw a bluebird light on the mail box, hop inside, come out with the letter in its bill and fly away.

The official report of the operation of the Panama Canal for July places the number of ocean-going vessels making the transit of the canal in that month at 150—77 from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and 73 from the Pacific to the Atlantic. By nationality these vessels were: United States, 28; British, 75; Japanese, 11; Peruvian, 9; Dutch, 2; Chilean, 7; Norwegian, 9; Swedish, 3; Mexican, 1; French, 1; Danish, 3; and Panamanian, 1. The total net tonnage of the vessels making the transit was 488,968.

Patrick Deering and a trout measuring $24\frac{3}{4}$ inches, the largest ever seen in Ridgway, Pa., occupied an ambulance on their way to the hospital the other day. This is the story Deering's friends tell: Patrick, while diving in Laurel Mill pool, collided with the trout. The fish, stunned by the blow, immediately rose to the surface and was captured by other swimmers. Pat, sorely hurt, was pulled from the water. An ambulance was summoned and the strange companions in distress were taken to the hospital.

Great Britain's first Government model tavern has been opened at Carlisle. It is called the Gretna Tavern and Coffee House, and is under the management of the Central Control (Liquor Traffic Board). The latter will pay to those conducting the establishment a commission on the sales of food and non-alcoholic drinks, but not on alcoholic drinks. Beer, but no spirits, will be on sale. The board's object is to replace small and unsuitable premises where a large trade in liquor is done by more commodious premises where refreshments may be obtained in healthful surroundings.

James Slocum learned to his sorrow that it does not pay to swear while testifying before Justice Clift in the Northeastern Police Station, Baltimore. Slocum uttered six oaths, and for each oath an additional fine of \$5 was added to the original fine of \$50 and costs which had been placed against him after he was convicted of disturbing the peace in East Madison street. The total fine amounted to \$80 and costs. Slocum will spend the next eighty-two days in jail.

Climbing hand over hand to the top of the smokestack on the sugar factory at Eaton, Col., five young women of Eaton did the human fly act on a dare by their male companions, who promised them a box of candy each if they accomplished the feat. The smokestack is 231 feet high and is built of cement. The women not only climbed to the top but returned to the ground in order without assistance from any of the men, some of whom had attempted the feat and failed. The young women who got to the top of the stack were Misses Martin White, Irene Pixler, Lettie White and Mesdames L. M. Steneking and Anna Bickle.

Dr. A. W. Reynolds of Caldonia, Iowa, is shy about \$2,500 as a result of some one discovering the hiding place of his money. He does an extensive loan business in the southern part of Ringgold County, and recently a payment of over \$2,000 was made him. According to the doctor he put the money in a glass fruit jar and buried it in a flower bed a few feet from the front porch. The next day a neighbor asked him for a loan. Shortly after the neighbor left Dr. Reynolds went to the hiding place and found nothing. It has been known for years that Dr. Reynolds had money hidden on his premises, and it is supposed some one has been systematically watching and secured this jar of money.

Mrs. Lyle Perry of Flatrock Township is a teacher in the schools at Clifford, northeast of Columbus, Ind. Last winter she had a hen that "stole out her nest." The hen finally selected a large pile of anthracite coal and laid three eggs there. Then she nursed the eggs for the required length of time and three chickens came out. Mrs. Perry did not wish to lose the chickens, and would not leave them at home when she went to school. So she solved the problem by taking them with her in the morning and returning them at evening until they were old enough to shift for themselves. The chickens were hatched in January and now one of the pullets has been enterprising enough to hatch out a brood of seventeen little chickens to repay Mrs. Perry for her trouble.

MAKING IT PAY

—OR—

The Boy Who Bought a Newspaper

BY WILLIAM WADE

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER IX (Continued).

"You'd hate to send an innocent man to prison when a word or two from you could save it, wouldn't you? Confound that noise! What is it anyhow? Come closer. Would you give me your word that you were mistaken in identifying me if I tell you something?"

"Out with it!" said Dick, sternly. "How much do you mean to offer me to lie so as to save you from prison? At what sum do you value my honesty?"

At that moment the guard came hurrying toward them and said in the greatest excitement:

"They say the reservoir dam up in the hill towns, ten miles or so back, has burst and let out thousands of tons of water into the river, and that there's already been a lot of damage done."

"Is that so?" asked Dick. "This is news I must find out more about."

He hurried away and was out of the prison portion of the building and at the offices when he met the sheriff, who was also the warden.

"I hear there's been a flood up the river," the latter said. "I can't get full particulars. I am afraid there'll be a good deal of damage when the water gets out from among the hills and spreads over the country. I don't think there's any danger here, however."

"That must have been the sound I heard and which I thought was thunder," mused Dick, as he hurried on. "That roaring sound was the water rushing down the river. Good heavens! Unless it spreads out over the meadows before it reaches town the damage will be tremendous."

He was in the outer office when he heard a great crash, followed by shouts and confused sounds.

"What has happened?" he gasped.

In a few moments the sheriff's clerk came hurrying into the room.

"The flood has undermined the walls of the old prison," he said. "The new is all right, but there's a big hole in the old part."

Just then the sheriff himself ran in and said:

"Call out all the guards. Part of the old prison has fallen and some of the prisoners are missing."

"Where was Dunlap kept?"

"In the old part."

"And his cell overlooks the river?"

"Yes."

A guard ran in at this moment

"Dunlap is missing!" he said.

CHAPTER X.

ONE WAY TO SEND THE NEWS.

The flood had been most unexpected, and its cause one that no one had foreseen.

Up in the hills, ten miles or so back from Norwood, was a large reservoir built to supply Norwood and other towns with pure drinking water.

A presumably responsible company had built it, and the dam over which the excess of water flowed was supposed to be strong enough to stand any amount of pressure on it.

It had suddenly given way, however, and once the water forced a passage it had crumbled as if built of sand, projecting hundreds of thousands of gallons of water into the valley.

What Dick had taken for a distant thunder-clap was the bursting of the dam, and this had been heard with startling distinctness by those living close at hand, and had warned them of the impending danger.

The river arose at once to a tremendous height, bridges were carried away, houses were flooded and in many cases wrecked, and many persons narrowly escaped with their lives.

Had the accident happened during the time when the factories were running, the loss of life would have been considerable, as there were many mills and manufacturies on the river which were completely demolished.

News of the disaster was sent to Norwood at once, but before full particulars could be received the railroad was damaged at several points, the telegraph poles were carried away and the wires broken.

The river at Norwood was greatly swollen and filled with debris of all sorts, the railroad bridge just above the town was destroyed, and the little bridge near the railroad station demolished, but the damage in the town itself was slight, owing to the water having spread itself out over the meadows.

The railroad bridge had been lifted right from its stone piers, carried down stream and dashed against the wall of the older part of the jail, making a considerable breach, which the water had widened.

The other walls of several cells were thus torn away, or so great a breach made in them that it was an easy matter to drop from them into the swollen stream. In one or two cases the water rushed in at the apertures and flooded the cells so that there was great danger of the occupants being drowned.

Whether Dunlap had been washed out by the flood or had taken his chances of escape by diving into the river could not be ascertained, but he was certainly missing, and the most probable solution was that he had escaped.

As soon as Dick ascertained that there was no damage done to the office building, nor likely to be any, he called Thornton and said:

(To be continued.)

FROM ALL POINTS

A big rattlesnake, several feet long and nearly four inches in diameter, was killed by Mrs. John Thompson on her farm in Brown County, Indiana. Several of the rattles were broken in the fight, and it is not known exactly how many the snake had. The snake's fangs were extracted. They were more than half an inch long.

Mr. James White, vice-chairman of the Dominion Conservation Commission, is at present in British Columbia securing data in connection with the proposed utilization of fish offal. While at the present time a portion of this waste fish is used in the manufacture of fertilizer, but a small percentage is disposed of in this manner, most of it being thrown overboard. It is estimated that 25 per cent. of halibut, and from 20 to 30 per cent. of salmon, is included in the entrails, head, tail, etc.

To be riding one horse and kicked by another and then to be forced to travel five miles for medical assistance was the experience of Percy Barker, young Capay farmer. Barker is at a hospital in Woodland, Cal., with his right leg broken in two places. The accident occurred in the western Yoko hills. Barker was in the saddle when another horse plunged his hoof into his leg while trying to kick Barker's mount. Barker then rode five miles to the Clarence Scott home, where a physician was summoned.

R. K. O'Neil, Deputy County Clerk, San Jose, Cal., has neatly solved the question of how a woman can become a naturalized American citizen. He politely suggested to Miss Myra Cutter that she get married to an American and thus become a citizen automatically. Miss Cutter thought the advice was kindly meant, but said she thought it "a bit drastic." Miss Cutter came to this country from Canada, coming across the bridge on a wagon. Since she came from no port and had no clearance papers, it was hard for her to prove the date of her arrival.

The Government of Venezuela plans to build a national highway from Caracas, the capital, to San Cristobal, in the Andes region, at the extreme western end of the republic, which, if plans are carried out, will be the largest public work ever undertaken by a Government of Venezuela. The highway will be 683 miles in length, and will be built through the cities of Valencia, San Carlos, Guanare, Barinas and San Antonio. It is probable that the Ministry of Public Works of Venezuela will undertake the construction of the road without aid from outside contractors.

The great sea serpent is reported, in "Nature," to have been seen on June 14th by a Swedish officer, Major O. Smith, in a small arm of the Baltic not far from Stockholm. He and others claim to have seen, at a distance of 100 meters, a huge serpent's head, and behind it successive humps of a serpent-like body, with a length of about 80 feet. The usual skeptical comments have, however, followed this report. Another Swede writes that last year he observed a similar spectacle, which turned out to be due to sudden gusts of wind raising small, regular billows, which interfered with the reflection of the sun from the water and thus intensified the effect.

A white robin which has been exhibiting himself on the lawn of the State capitol building at Lansing, Mich., has caused more comment than anything that has happened in that town in a long time. The freak bird, with its white breast and white head, made its appearance several weeks ago. Since that time it has been the object of survey after survey. According to Justice Joseph H. Steere, of the Michigan Supreme Court, who is the capitol's authority on birds and animals, the albino robin is a freak but by no means such a rarity as one would expect. The albino color, he declares, often extends to blackbirds and crows, while albino deer are by no means uncommon. George Shiras, an expert on the photographing of wild animals and birds, goes so far as to introduce the albino porcupine, having a photograph of one he saw in Canada.

G. B. H. Austin, an Australian engineer, has invented an airship which will, he claims, be superior to the Zeppelin in action. It is an automatic balancing machine, and its planes act as girders and serve the purpose of a parachute when a descent is made. It is asserted that it will lift greater weights in proportion to its size than aircraft in present use, and will carry guns of longer range. A suspended car will serve to give the guns a steady platform. Trials have been made with a model of the machine equipped with a 12-horse-power engine. Carrying a weight of 380 pounds, the model flew to a height of 250 feet for various distances up to a mile without the aid of a pilot, the distance to be covered being regulated by a clockwork attachment connected with the engine. In every case the model landed safely "on all fours." It is claimed that the full-sized machine will be able to carry a weight of 15 tons, including the engines, and will be equipped with two long-range guns at each end of the platform. It is estimated that an engine of 1,000 horse-power will be needed to drive the machine. A company is being formed to build a full-sized machine and offer it to the British Government to be tested.

TIMELY TOPICS

Mrs. William Davis of No. 828 Sandusky avenue, Kansas City, Kan., has found a preparedness precaution taken against burglars unprofitable. Mrs. Davis hid a half-carat diamond ring and a pair of ear-rings, each set with a diamond weighing five-eighths carat, in a pillowslip the other night. The pillowslip was sent with a bundle of clothes to a laundry the next morning. The jewelry has not been recovered.

Three women in a buggy stopped along the St. Joseph River, four miles northwest of South Bend, Ind., the other afternoon for a picnic. The horse was blind and wandered into the river, drawing the buggy with it. Unable to see, the animal kept to the middle of the river and had swam half a mile down stream, drawing the buggy, when it was seen by a boy, who swam to the middle of the river, unhitched the horse and led it to the shore. The buggy sank to the bottom of the river.

It is now believed that fully 85 per cent. of the hay fever prevalent in the autumn is due to the pollen of the common ragweed, while goldenrod, which has been popularly credited with being the chief cause of the disease, is almost completely innocent. The pollen of ragweed is carried in great abundance by the wind. That of goldenrod is not easily detached from the flower, and, when transported abroad, is borne chiefly on the legs and bodies of bees and other insects.

J. W. Wilson, an attorney of Petersburg, Ind., has a dead South Carolina poplar tree in the back of his law office. Several months ago he noticed a sprig of green sprouting from one of the limbs. He knew the tree was dead, and watched the sprout until now it has grown into a large sunflower bush that will be ready to bloom in a few days. There is no way to get moisture to the sunflower and the limb is less than two inches in diameter, yet it has withstood the drought while vegetation on the earth has perished.

A baby's curiosity nearly led to her death by a rattlesnake bite at Pomona, Cal., the other day. Little two-year-old Ruth Dougherty was playing on her father's lawn when she spied the rattler. She had her pet cat with her. She was about to try and catch the rattlesnake when the cat's actions attracted the attention of the child's father. He rushed out from the house and killed the snake with a club. He declares that the rattler was watching the cat and the cat the rattler. This, he believes, kept the snake from attacking his daughter.

Silkworms may be cultivated on the island of Trinidad, British West Indies, according to a bulletin of the Imperial Institute, quoted by The Textile Mercury of Manchester, England. It is stated that the result of various experiments on the island in rearing the worms have proved satisfactory. It has been suggested that, if the industry should be introduced in Trinidad, it should be carried on by women and children in the villages, in order to increase the resources of the colony without taking male laborers from other occupations.

The speed, power and flexibility of electrically-driven fire apparatus were recently demonstrated in a test made in Paterson, N. J. A combination chemical engine and hose wagon, with its crew of 14 men, and an aerial ladder truck, with its crew of 22 men, were used for the demonstration. The two pieces of apparatus were both converted horse-drawn trucks. In the first test both trucks ran up an 18.28 per cent. grade, the first in 1 minute 13 seconds, and the second in 1 minute 18 seconds. On climbing this hill a second time both trucks were stopped in the center of the steepest part of the hill and then run to the top at the same speed as before. In another test on another hill, also over an 18 per cent. grade, both trucks negotiated the hill in 1 minute 20 seconds, the best previous time made on the hill being over 2 minutes. In a further demonstration a speed of 30 miles per hour was maintained on a level stretch of about one mile.

An electrical engineer residing in Kansas City has constructed an electro-chemical apparatus with which he claims he can produce gasoline at a small fraction of the present cost, says Popular Mechanics. The process as outlined by the inventor consists in pumping both kerosene and natural gas into a still continuously. The oil is vaporized by heat and mixed with gas, and then passes through a treating chamber on the way to a condenser. The mixture is treated with a high-frequency current, and the oil vapors are broken up and united with the gas vapors. The originator of the process points out that both kerosene and natural gas are hydrocarbons, as is also gasoline, and it is his contention that his treatment unites the light with the heavy vapors in the right proportion and condenses the same, producing gasoline. Not more than five kilowatts of electricity is required to convert 10,000 gallons of heavier oil into gasoline in a day, and less than a cubic foot of gas is needed for each gallon of the final product. As yet the inventor claims to have succeeded only in converting kerosene into gasoline, but he believes that in time he can accomplish the same result with crude oil.

SIMPLE SAM

THE POOR BOY

—OR—

Not So Green As He Looked

BY J. P. RICHARDS

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER VIII (Continued).

He smiled and said:

"Good-morning, ladies and gentlemen! Glad to see you. Just come to the spring here and make yourselves at home."

But neither the girls nor their escorts went near the spring, for the tramps were lying within ten feet of it.

"Let's go back home," suggested one of the girls.

"That's better," replied one of the young men, "for we don't want to have those fellows around."

One of the tramps overheard his remark and blurted out with a blast of profanity, saying:

"What's the matter with us fellows? We may not be as well dressed as you are, but we are better men every time."

Then the other began following up his lead, telling the young men to run home to their mammas, as they would gather the berries for the young ladies.

"What's the matter with you fellows going home yourselves?" Simple Sam asked their leader.

"Say, cully, we are a hundred miles away from home, and it's rather a long run."

"Well, if it's a long run the sooner you start the quicker you'll get there."

"Well, we are not going to start right now, and don't you forget it."

"Yes, you are," said Sam, and he walked up boldly to the tramps and added:

"Those ladies have come out to spend the day berrying around this place and to enjoy a noon-day lunch in the shade. This land here belongs to the father of one of them, and she expresses a wish that you and your friend leave and let them have possession."

The tramp sneered and remarked:

"Not much!"

"Say, you had better go, and be in a hurry about it," said Sam.

"Nixie, sonny!"

Sam reached out and caught him by the collar of his ragged coat.

The tramp struck at him viciously, but it was like striking a solid log.

Sam paid no attention to it, but ran to the creek, which was some fifty yards from the spring, taking the tramp with him. There he coolly picked him up and tossed him into the stream at a place where the water was six or eight feet deep.

The others immediately ran forward to assist their companion.

Now, the greatest insult that you can give a tramp anywhere in America is to throw him into water or to throw water on him. They neither drink it nor bathe in it, unless circumstances beyond their control compel them to do so.

As fast as they reached Sam, he hurled them into the stream.

Two of them made a joint attack on him with the intention of throwing him in; but they went in themselves at a headlong plunge.

Two of them drew revolvers, but the cartridges were damp. They snapped repeatedly at him, but no explosion followed.

Just below the big hole in the creek was a footbridge, made of an immense poplar tree, the upper side of which had been hewn halfway to the middle.

Two of the tramps proceeded to climb up the banks on the other side, but Sam ran across the footbridge, and as they climbed up on the bank he seized them and hurled them back into the water.

The horrible profanity in which they indulged caused the girls and their escorts to run nearly a quarter of a mile away to get out of hearing of them.

They stopped on a rise of the hill from which they could see Sam hurling them back into the stream as fast as they could crawl out.

He would run across the footbridge from one side to the other.

The water was pretty cold, and soon the tramps were shivering.

At last they promised that if he would let them come out they would go away.

"All right," said Sam, "if you come back again while those ladies are here I'll take each of you by the back of your neck and hold you under the water until you become food for tadpoles."

They agreed to keep away.

Not one of them cared to run up against a man with such strength, and they went down the stream to the main road about half a mile away.

Then Sam waved his hat to the girls and boys, calling out:

"Come back! Come back! They have all gone."

They returned to the spring, some of the girls being extremely nervous and doubtful about tramps keeping their promise.

"Don't you worry, girls," said Sam. "I told them if they showed up here again I'd hold each one's head under the water till he was drowned. They know that I can do it, so they will keep their promise."

"Oh, Joe," sighed one of the girls, who was a sentimental miss, "don't you wish you had such strength as Sam?"

"Yes, indeed! But his courage is even greater than his strength. Some of them drew their revolvers and tried to shoot him, but their powder was wet. I think he is the bravest boy that I ever saw or heard of."

FACTS WORTH READING

DOG COMMITS SUICIDE.

Frightened by the lightning flashes and crashes of thunder, a valuable collie dog owned by Oliver Minor, of Norwalk, Conn., committed suicide during the storm the other afternoon by drowning himself in a cistern. As the flashes of lightning became sharper and the thunder increased the dog was seen to run back and forth seeking shelter. Then it took several leaps to the cistern and dived in.

FARMER PLOUGHS UP WEALTH.

A farmer named Palmer, near Nacona, Tex., a few days ago ploughed up silver bars on his farm variously estimated to be worth from \$100,000 to \$280,000, it became known recently. Palmer says he will send the bars to the Denver Mint for analysis. It is believed the silver bars were left here by Spaniards in the sixteenth or seventeenth century when they retreated owing to the activity of the Indians against them.

USING THE SAME ENVELOPE TWELVE TIMES.

A considerable economy has been effected by the Rock Island railroad lines in stationery, through the use of one envelope several times. The fronts of the inter-department envelopes used by the company are ruled off into twelve squares for names and addresses. Each time an envelope has served its purpose, the last name and address is crossed out and the envelope, after receiving a new name and address in the next empty square, is ready for another journey. During the past two years the cost of 3,252,000 envelopes has been saved, or an equivalent of \$1,856.40. It is well to add that the envelopes of this kind are used only for inter-department business.

POWER LINE POLES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Speaking before the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers, with reference to the electrical plant on a Swaziland tin mine, Mr. W. Elsdon-Dew said that no trouble had been experienced from attacks by white ants on the power line poles when these had been creosoted, and if paraffin were periodically introduced into a hole bored into the wood near the base of the pole. But blue-gum or eucalyptus poles cut from trees that had been growing less than five years have a very short life through dry-rot setting in. Black wattle of more than five years' growth would now be used, and much better results were expected.

ELECTROCUTED AT IRONING.

Standing on a damp basement floor while using an electric iron, Mrs. Augusta Tichorowski, of

Cleveland, was electrocuted the other day. From an investigation by the police it is thought that the woman tried to adjust the plug at the base of the iron without shutting off the current.

While doing this her hand evidently came in contact with the live end of the plug wire and the current passed through her body into the damp floor. Her two children ran frightened for aid. When neighbors arrived they found Mrs. Tichorowski unconscious, her hand clutching the plug end of the cord.

MAN-OF-WAR BIRD FASTEST OF FLYERS.

There has been much gross exaggeration respecting the wing power of birds. That teal and some other ducks, terns, skimmers, plover, swallows and peregrine falcons may sometimes attain a speed exceeding a mile a minute is certain; that anything but the frigate bird and the chimney swift can much exceed this is very doubtful. Estimates of such fabulous speed as 120 miles an hour are probably much overdrawn or are downright inventions.

One may sometimes test this when riding in a railroad train through country where birds are traveling back and forth and often flying parallel with the track. It becomes at once apparent that if the train is moving faster than twenty miles an hour a good many birds attain less speed, even when doing their best. A fast train runs away from or keeps even with the swiftest species.

Weight may add to momentum and thus increase the speed, though really causing very little added resistance; therefore, a bird, while not being able to do the aerial stunts that a dragonfly or a butterfly can do, is very much faster in going straight ahead. Tremendous wing power and speed may make up for lack of momentum to a great extent, according to the calculation of a writer in the Philadelphia Ledger. Thus there is not much difference between the straightaway speed of a hawk and that of a wild duck, the latter having much the greater weight, though a much smaller wing area. On the other hand, a sparrow is not nearly as fast as a hummingbird.

Perhaps the speediest of all winged creatures, even without respect to size, is the chimney swift. The man-of-war bird, often called frigate pelican, has been generally conceded to fly faster than all other birds; the black skimmer and the killdeer plover are near first-raters, but after watching all these go past at high speed and at about the same distance away repeatedly and also watching them during long flights, when they are trying to get somewhere in a hurry, it appears as though the swallow-like, bristle-tailed swift had a little the better in any estimate.

INTERESTING ARTICLES

POLICEWOMAN SAVES WOMAN.

Mrs. Hannah D. Long, Trenton's only police-woman, saved the life of Florence Stillman, thirty-five years old, at the police station the other day, when the latter hanged herself with her stocking in a cell. The police say this was the eleventh time the woman attempted her life. Judge Geraghty sent the woman to the County Jail for six months.

WOMAN SITS IN POLE HOLE.

Employees of the Pennsylvania Central Light and Power Company were frustrated the other day when they attempted to plant an arc light pole in front of Mrs. Mary Risinger's home, at Altoona, Pa. The woman, with a child in her arms, sat in the hole for an hour, until Director of Public Safety W. C. Myton arrived and ordered work stopped pending an investigation. She did not want the light shining in her windows at night.

SERVANT WILLS TO EMPLOYER.

When the will of Lina Matherny, a servant in the household of Dr. Emanuel Baruch, of 57 East Seventy-seventh street, New York, was filed, it was found she had left the savings of thirty years to her employer. Miss Matherny had put aside \$10,000 in the years spent in Dr. Baruch's service.

An odd memorandum attached to the will attracted attention in the Surrogate's Court. Miss Matherny requested the authorities to prevent any one from breaking the will. As the instrument was drawn up in legal form, there is little likelihood that a fight could be waged successfully against the will.

BOYS FIND \$8,070 ROBBERS' LOOT.

A box containing \$8,070, which was stolen when two men held up and fatally wounded Lee Rankin, paymaster for the Youghiogeny & Ohio Coal Company, near Martins Ferry, Ohio, was found by boys in a wood a few hundred yards from the scene of the robbery. No attempt had been made to force open the lock, and the authorities believe the robbers dropped the box, which weighed about ninety pounds in order to escape. Harry Baldine of Belaire, Ohio, who was arrested as a suspect, was identified by Paul Pickens, the chauffeur of the automobile in which the money was being carried, as one of the robbers, according to the police.

SAVES BABY FROM WILDCAT.

A mother's bravery prevented a huge wildcat from carrying off a six-months'-old baby on the bank of the Feather River near Marysville, Cal.

Mrs. Eben Fanning, who camped with her hus-

band and baby along the river, returned after a short stroll one afternoon recently, in time to see a big wildcat in the act of carrying her baby from the basket in which it was asleep.

The animal did not run when Mrs. Fanning shrieked, but stood its ground and held onto the screaming baby. Mrs. Fanning picked up a club and fought the animal, which at length dropped the child and ran into the woods.

The baby was badly bitten about the face and body. It will recover.

GIRL IS CABINETMAKER.

When anything is needed in the furniture line in the Von Manderscheld home in Alameda, Cal., they call in Florita.

Miss Florita von Manderscheld is an expert carpenter and joiner. She takes to tools as the ordinary girl takes to curling irons. She has been hammering away for several years now, and has never so much as knocked the beauty parlor finish off her thumb-nail.

She made a mahogany library table of such craftsmanship that Principal George C. Thompson of the Alameda High School threw out the one he already had and bought Florita's.

Florita has made, among other articles, two large mahogany library tables, a walnut china closet, a shaving cabinet, equipped with a bevel mirror; a gun rack which looks like a china closet, piano bench, tabouret, cozy corner seat, and a doll's chair. She is her own designer.

AN ICE CAVE.

Two to three feet of ice throughout the cave for its entire length of about one-quarter of a mile was found by Frank S. Spofford, Assistant Supervisor of Surveys, as a result of the investigation he was ordered to make by the Commissioner of General Land Office of the cave located about twenty-five miles east of Dubois, Fremont County, Idaho.

Mr. Spofford describes the cave as being about thirty feet wide over its whole depth, with a varying height of from five to twenty-five feet. He penetrated its full length and found a great unevenness of the base, evidently caused by falling rocks from the roof.

The country in which the cave occurs is a series of lava beds and the cave is a lava formation. There are no stalactites or stalagmites, and Mr. Spofford suggests that the ice formations are due to seepage water that has frozen. Ice is present all year. Settlers in the region are taking ice and water from the cave for domestic use.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 18, 1916.

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Good Current News Articles

The Rev. H. F. Coffelt, pastor of the Rouzerville Lutheran Church, Waynesboro, Pa., had a thrilling experience while fishing. A blacksnake crawled up his leg and wrapped itself around it so tightly that the minister was forced to cut its folds with a knife.

A mystery of twenty-six years was cleared up when C. G. Ray, of Downs, near Smith Centre, Kan., received a letter from a man in Omaha, who confessed to setting fire to the Ray barn in September, 1893. The writer then was a boy six years old. His excuse for confessing the crime at this late date is that he "had no luck" at anything he undertook, and he finally decided that things would change if he confessed the wrong done so many years ago.

The largest buck killed this season fell to Robert Sloan, of Klamath Falls, Ore., lately. The deer was killed on Buck Mountain and weighed 223 pounds before being dressed. It is the largest deer ever killed in the vicinity of Buck Mountain. Sloan had hunted this buck for eight years, he said. He is positive the buck he killed is the one he has hunted, because a toe on the left front foot was gone. For eight years he has been seeing the tracks of this deer and each season has hunted it.

From Pekin, China, a United States Marine Corps note says: "After trimming the feathers and otherwise disguising their mascot eagle, the United States marines attached to the American Legation here, recently succeeded in matching their bird of freedom to fight a previously undefeated cock which was the pride of the Chinese sporting element. Upon being placed in the pit, the eagle went to sleep. The cock, full of pep, bravely handed his adversary two blows. This was too much for the marine mascot; he awoke from his dream of the snow-capped Sierras and deliberately pulled the chicken's head off. Our sea soldiers anticipate no further challenge."

According to the Mechanical Engineer, a British firm has designed a lifting magnet, in which the whole of the magnetic flux is utilized for lifting effect, there being no diversion of the lines through the chains or suspension gear. There are two rectangular soft-iron pole-pieces with a cylindrical core between them, and two annular coils wound on the cores and connected to a convenient source of supply. Between the coils, and equidistant from the pole-pieces, is a central rectangular plate, to the top corners of which are attached two chains united by a common ring, through which the chain hook passes. This central plate does not become magnetized when the current is turned on, consequently the attachment to it of lifting chains does not divert the magnetic flux from the main work of lifting the load.

Grins and Chuckles

"Pa, what is home rule?" "Don't ask me. Ask your mother."

Bacon—Has your wife a cook-book? Egbert—Oh, yes. "Did you ever get anything out of it?" "Sure! Indigestion."

"I once thought seriously of marrying for money." "Why didn't you, then?" "The girl in the case did some thinking, too."

Johnny—Mamma, will you wash my face? Mamma—Why, Johnny, can't you do that? Johnny—Yes, but I'll have to wet my hands, and they don't need it.

Builder—I've just caught that man Brown hanging about, smoking during working hours, so I gave him his four days' wages and told him to clear out. Foreman—Good 'eavens, guv'nor! That chap was only looking for a job.

Dealer—This is the best parrot we have, but I wouldn't sell him without letting you know his one fault; he'll grumble terribly if his food doesn't suit him. Miss Fitz—I'll take him; it will seem quite like having a man in the house.

"Here," said Teddy's father, exhibiting the little boy a coin, "is a penny 300 years old. It was given to me when I was a little boy." "Say!" ejaculated Teddy, "just think of anybody being able to keep a penny that long without spending it."

Tailor—The postal service is in a wretched condition. Friend—Never noticed it. Tailor—Well, I have. During last month I posted one hundred and eighty statements of accounts, with requests for immediate payment, and, so far as I can learn, not more than two of my customers received their letters.

ARTICLES OF ALL KINDS

X-RAYS USED IN ENGINEERING.

Roentgen rays have been recently used successfully in Switzerland in photographing the iron reinforcements of concrete work. The results are attracting much attention among Swiss construction engineers. The advantages of being able to make an examination of the condition of such reinforcements or the proper disposition and situation thereof without destroying the concrete structure are self-evident, as well as the desirability of being able to make an inspection of the position of the reinforcing iron rods upon the completion of the cement parts of a new building or a new structure.

ALASKAN BEAR KILLS SALMON.

Millions of salmon are destroyed every year by the bears of Alaska, says E. Lester Jones, deputy commissioner of the Bureau of Fisheries, who looked into the salmon situation in Alaska for Uncle Sam.

The bears, he says, haunt the shores of streams during the spawning season, and, besides killing huge quantities of salmon for food, slay many thousands of others just for the pure joy of the sport.

The commissioner in his report tells how at Black Bear Creek in the Cleveland Peninsula he found the shores for 150 feet on both sides littered with hundreds upon hundreds of humpback, silver and chum salmon that had been tossed out of the water by bears.

Hardly any of the fish had been mutilated except the marks of the bear's claws on their backs. All that was eaten was the "cheek" of the salmon, the bear, according to Commissioner Jones, being very fastidious and preferring that part to any other.

SKATING INFANTRYMEN.

The Norwegian army boasts of a corps of infantry that can cover a distance of eighty miles in a day's march. This wonderful record, which equals the performance of the best trained cavalry in the world, is possible only because every man in this corps is a well-trained skater, provided with specially constructed skates. Maneuvers by this corps are executed with wonderful rapidity. The heels of their skates are so shaped as to enable the men to spin around as though on pivots. They can "right about face" far more quickly than any crack regiment of infantry, says Wellspring. It should be added that the movements of the corps are naturally confined to the great fiords, or narrow inlets of the sea that indent the coast of Norway. These, during the long winter, are frozen solid. For patrol and scout duty these soldier skaters are relied upon to be of the greatest service if Norway should go to war. The men are the pick of a skating nation, and their commander holds many prizes as the champion skater of his country.

GIRL'S PROFIT IN HOGS.

Raising hogs for pleasure and profit is the occupation of Miss Josie Fuller, seventeen, the youngest and best all-around feminine pork producer in the Imperial Valley, Cal.

It is her ambition to become the best expert on hogs in her district. Her herd numbers fifty strong and is increasing.

"Pig culture isn't esthetic work, of course," said Miss Fuller. "It can't be considered a finishing school for debutantes, but there's money in it."

She has established a record of developing her porkers for the market at a cost of 3½ cents a pound. She came within half a cent of winning the University of California prize, which would have entitled her to a transcontinental trip. The judges decided she spent too much time in caring for her hogs. This was charged up against profit and cut down her score.

"However," she said, "I feel that it pays to spend plenty of time with hogs. It makes them contented and that means money. Kindness is a big factor in hog raising."

"Women may not admire hogs, but if they don't it's because they know so little about them. Once interested they become just as capable as men in handling swine."

SAVING OLD MAIL BAGS.

The repair and proper maintenance of mail bags is in an establishment at Washington, and the number repaired and placed in good condition in the last year was a million.

One of the difficulties connected with this repairing process was the accumulated dirt and dust which attached to these bags when returned from the service. A system was finally adopted consisting of large tumbling barrels, each having a capacity of several hundred bags. Driven rapidly by electric power, the dust confined to a tightly constructed room and carried off by blowers and lodged in immense canvas receptacles, resembling a dirigible balloon when inflated, this process was found thoroughly suitable. Four thousand a day are treated by this process.

The life of a mail bag is about six years, but the rough usage to which it is exposed makes many of them unfit for repair. Such bags as still have good material make what is known as "pieced bags." Many are thus reclaimed and returned to service.

The advent of the parcel post has made it necessary to enlarge the repair shop, because at times it was found impossible to obtain bags from the contractor in quantities sufficient to meet the demand. A manufacturing feature was therefore added, and in the last two years more than 250,000 bags have been produced.

CACHOO OR SNEEZING POWDER.



The greatest fun-maker of them all. A small amount of this powder, when blown in a room, will cause everyone to sneeze without anyone knowing where it comes from. It is very light, will float in the air for some time, and penetrate every nook and corner of a room. It is perfectly harmless. Cachoo is put up in bottles, and one bottle contains enough to be used from 10 to 50 times. Price, by express prepaid, 10 bottles for One Dollar.

No less than 10 bottles can be bought.
WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N.Y.

SURPRISE MOVING-PICTURE MACHINE.



It consists of a small nicked metal tube, 4 1/2 inches long, with a lens eye-view, which shows a pretty ballet girl or any other scene. Hand it to a friend who will be delighted with the first picture, tell him to turn the screw on the side of the instrument, to change the views, when a stream of water squirts in his face, much to his surprise. The instrument can be refilled with water in an instant, and one filling will suffice for four or five victims.

Price, 30c. each by mail, postpaid; 4 for \$1.00.
H. F. Lang, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N.Y.

THE LITTLE GEM TELEPHONE.



The transmitter in this telephone is made from the best imported parchment; with ordinary use will last a long time; can be made in any length by adding cord; the only real telephone for the money; each one put up in a neat box; fully illustrated, with full directions how to use them. Price, 12c., postpaid.

Wolff Novelty Co., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

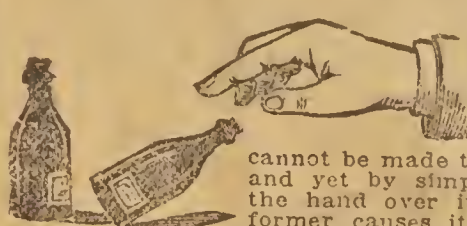
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MARBLE VASE.



A clever and puzzling effect, easy to do; the apparatus can be minutely examined. Effect: A marble can be made to pass from the hand into the closed vase, which a moment before was shown empty. This is a beautiful enameled turned wood vase.

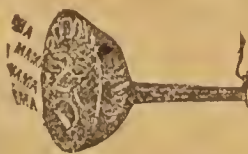
Price, 20c.
Wolff Novelty Co., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.



The Bottle Imp.—The peculiarity of this little bottle is that it cannot be made to lie down, and yet by simply passing the hand over it, the performer causes it to do so. This trick affords great amusement, and is of convenient size to carry about.

Price, 10c.
C. Behr, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

MAMAS.



This interesting toy is one of the latest novelties out. It is in great demand. To operate it, the stem is placed in your mouth. You can blow into it, and at the same time pull or jerk lightly on the string. The mouth opens, and it then cries "Ma-ma," just exactly in the tones of a real, live baby. The sound is so human that it would deceive anybody.

Price 12c. each by mail.
Wolff Novelty Co., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.



BOYS LOOK AT ME Do you want to know how to flirt, tell stories girls like to hear, write real love letters and be a dandy fellow with the girls? Write quick for **Lovers Casket** giving sample letters, and lots of other good things. All 10c. **Amusen Co.,** Strack Bldg., Milwaukee, Wis.

GREENBACKS

Pack of \$1,000 Stage Bills, 10c; 3 packs, 25c. Send for a pack and show the boys what a WAD you carry. **C. A. NICHOLS, JR.,** Box 90, Chill, N. Y.

TOBACCO HABIT

A very interesting book has been published on tobacco habit—how to conquer it quickly and easily. It tells the dangers of excessive smoking, chewing, snuff using, etc., and explains how nervousness, irritability, sleeplessness, weak eyes, stomach troubles and numerous other disorders may be eliminated through stopping self-poisoning by tobacco. The man who has written this book wants to genuinely help all who have become addicted to tobacco habit and says there's no need to suffer that awful craving or restlessness which comes when one tries to quit voluntarily. This is no mind-cure or temperance sermon tract, but plain common sense, clearly set forth. The author will send it free, postpaid, in plain wrapper. Write, giving name and full address—a postcard will do. Address: **Edward J. Woods,** 228 R. Station E, New York City. Keep this advertisement, it is likely to prove the best news you ever read in this journal.

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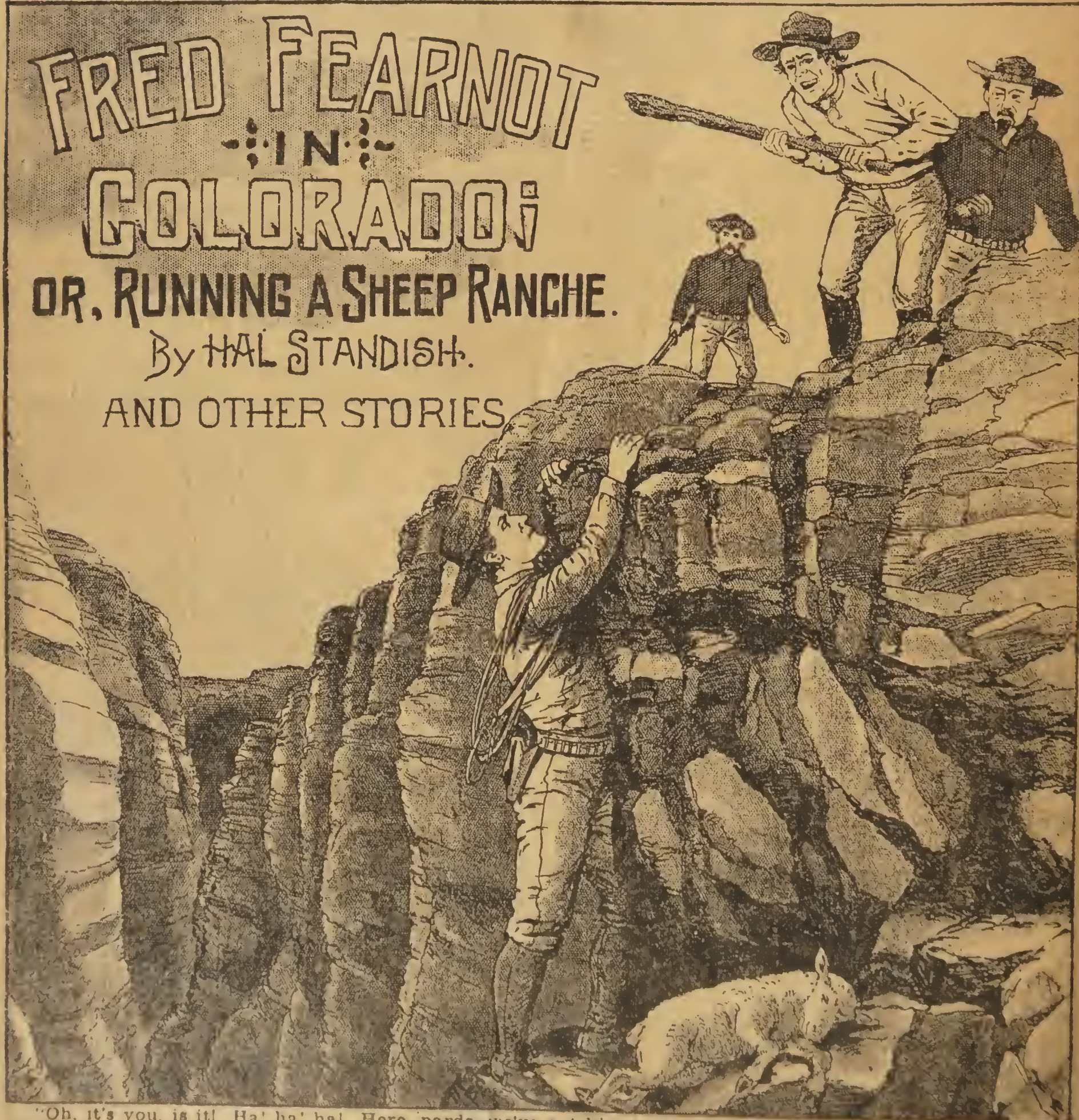
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"Oh, it's you, is it! Ha! ha! ha! Here, pards, we've got him at last!" and two more of the villains came running up, grinning triumphantly at Fearnot's predicament.



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